

INTERNATIONAL SHORT STORIES

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Study of a Head, by Murillo

THE UMBRELLA, by Guy de Maupassant
THE COUNTESS OF AMALFI, by Gabriele D'Annunzio
CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA, by Giovanni Verga
THE SNOW WIND, by Boris Pilniak
LOVE, FAITH AND HOPE, by Leonid Andreyev
MARRIAGE A LA MODE, by Katherine Mansfield
THE GREATER SEA, by Khalil Gibran
THE ISLAND OF THE FAY, by Edgar Allan Poe
THE EASTERN WINDOW, by E. G. Swain
A SIMPLE STORY, by Elizabeth Inchbald
JEN HSIU, by Songling Pu
TOMMY AND THOMAS, by Octave Thanet
AUNT ZEZE'S TEARS, by Carmen Dolores

THE UMBRELLA

from the Internet Archive of *The Works of Guy de Maupassant, Vol 2*

Mme. Oreille was a very economical woman; she thoroughly knew the value of a half-penny, and possessed a whole storehouse of strict principles with regard to the multiplication of money, so that her cook found the greatest difficulty in making what the servants call their "market-penny," while her husband was hardly allowed any pocket-money at all. They were, however, very comfortably off, and had no children. It really pained Mme. Oreille to see any money spent; it was like tearing at her heartstrings when she had to take any of those nice crownpieces out of her pocket; and whenever she had to spend anything, no matter how necessary it was, she slept badly the next night.

Oreille was continually saying to his wife:
"You really might be more liberal, as we have no children and never spend our income."

"You don't know what may happen," she used to reply. "It is better to have too much than too little."

She was a little woman of about forty, very active, rather hasty, wrinkled, very neat and tidy, and with a very short temper. Her husband very often used to complain of all the privations she made him endure; some of them were particularly painful to him, as they touched his vanity.

He was one of the upper clerks in the War Office, and only stayed there in obedience to his wife's wish, so as to increase their income, which they did not nearly spend.

For two years he had always come to the office with the same old patched umbrella, to the great amusement of his fellow-clerks. At last he got tired of their jokes, and insisted upon his wife buying him a new one. She bought one for eight francs and a-half, one of those cheap things which large houses

sell as an advertisement. When the others in the office saw the article, which was being sold in Paris by the thousand, they began their jokes again, and Oreille had a dreadful time of it with them. They even made a song about it, which he heard from morning till night all over the immense building.

Oreille was very angry, and peremptorily told his wife to get him a new one, a good silk one, for twenty francs, and to bring him the bill, so that he might see that it was all right.

She bought him one for eighteen francs, and said, getting red with anger as she gave it to her husband:

"This will last you for five years at least."

Oreille felt quite triumphant, and obtained a small ovation at the office with his new acquisition. When he went home in the evening, his wife said to him, looking at the umbrella uneasily:

"You should not leave it fastened up with the elastic; it will very likely cut the silk. You must take care of it, for I shall not buy you a new one in a hurry."

She took it, unfastened it, and then remained dumfounded with astonishment and rage. In the middle of the silk there was a hole as big as a six-penny-piece, as if made with the end of a cigar.

"What is that?!" she screamed.

Her husband replied quietly, without looking at it:

"What is it? What do you mean.^^"

She was choking with rage and could hardly get out a word.

"You — you — have burned — your umbrella ! Why — you must be — mad! Do you wish to ruin us outright?"

He turned round hastily, as if frightened.

"What are you talking about?"

"I say that you have burned your umbrella. Just look here — "

And rushing at him, as if she were going to beat him, she violently thrust the little circular burned hole under his nose.

He was so utterly struck dumb at the sight of it that he could only stammer out:

"What — what is it? How should I know? I have done nothing, I will swear. I don't know what is the matter with the umbrella."

"You have been playing tricks with it at the office; you have been playing the fool and opening it, to show it off!" she screamed.

"I only opened it once, to let them see what a nice one it was, that is all, I declare."

But she shook with rage, and got up one of those conjugal scenes which make a peaceable man dread the domestic hearth more than a battlefield where bullets are raining.

She mended it with a piece of silk cut out of the old umbrella, which was of a different color, and the next day Oreille went off very humbly with the mended article in his hand. He put it into a cupboard, and thought no more of it than of some unpleasant recollection.

But he had scarcely got home that evening when his wife took the umbrella from him, opened it, and nearly had a fit when she saw what had befallen it, for the disaster was now irreparable. It was covered with small holes, which evidently, proceeded from burns, just as if some one had emptied the ashes from a lighted pipe on to it. It was done for utterly, irreparably.

She looked at it without a word, in too great a passion to be able to say anything. He also, when he saw the damage, remained almost dumb, in a state of frightened consternation.

They looked at each other; then he looked on to the floor. The next moment she threw the useless

article at his head, screaming out in a transport of the most violent rage, for she had now recovered her voice:

"Oh! you brute! you brute! You did it on purpose, but I will pay you out for it. You shall not have another."

And then the scene began again. After the storm had raged for an hour, he, at last, was enabled to explain himself. He declared that he could not understand it at all, and that it could only proceed from malice or from vengeance.

A ring at the bell saved him ; it was a friend whom they were expecting to dinner.

Mme. Oreille submitted the case to him. As for buying a new umbrella, that was out of the question; her husband should not have another. The friend very sensibly said that in that case his clothes would be spoiled, and they were certainly worth more than the umbrella. But the little woman, who was still in a rage, replied:

"Very well, then, when it rains he may have the kitchen umbrella, for I will not give him a new silk one."

Oreille utterly rebelled at such an idea.

"All right," he said; "then I shall resign my post. I am not going to the office with the kitchen umbrella."

The friend interposed:

"Have this one recovered; it will not cost much."

But Mme. Oreille, being in the temper that she was, said:

"It will cost at least eight francs to recover it. Eight and eighteen are twenty-six. Just fancy, twenty-six francs for an umbrella! It is utter madness!"

The friend, who was only a poor man of the middle classes, had an inspiration:

"Make your tire insurance pay for it. The companies pay for all articles that are burned, as long as the damage has been done in your own house."

On hearing this advice the little woman calmed down immediately, and then, after a moment's reflection, she said to her husband;

"To-morrow, before going to your office, you will go to the Maternelle Insurance Company, show them the state your umbrella is in, and make them pay for the damage."

M. Oreille fairly jumped, he was so startled at the proposal.

"I would not do it for my life! It is eighteen' francs lost, that is all. It will not ruin us."

The next morning he took a walking-stick when he went out, for, luckily, it was a fine day.

Left at home alone, Mme. Oreille could not get over the loss of her eighteen francs by any means. She had put the umbrella on the dining-room table, and she looked at it without being able to come to any determination.

Every moment she thought of the insurance company, but she did not dare to encounter the quizzical looks of the gentlemen who might receive her, for she was very timid before people, and grew red at a mere nothing, feeling embarrassed when she had to speak to strangers.

But regret at the loss of the eighteen francs pained her as if she had been wounded. She tried not to think of it any more, and yet every moment the recollection of the loss struck her painfully. What was she to do, however? Time went on, and she could not decide; but suddenly, like all cowards, she made up her mind.

"I will go, and we will see what will happen."

But first of all she was obliged to prepare the umbrella so that the disaster might be complete, and the reason of it quite evident. She took a match from the mantelpiece, and between the ribs she burned a

hole as big as the palm of her hand. Then she rolled it up carefully, fastened it with the elastic band, put on her bonnet and shawl, and went quickly toward the Rue de Rivoli, where the insurance office was.

But the nearer she got the slower she walked. What was she going to say, and what reply would she get?

She looked at the numbers of the houses; there were still twenty-eight. That was all right, she had time to consider, and she walked slower and slower. Suddenly she saw a door on which was a large brass plate with "La Maternelle Fire Insurance Office" engraved on it. Already! She waited for a moment, for she felt nervous and almost ashamed; then she went past, came back, went past again, and came back again.

At last she said to herself:

"I must go in, however, so I may as well do it now as later."

She could not help noticing, however, how her heart beat as she entered. She went into an enormous room with grated wicket openings all round, and a man behind each of them, and as a gentleman, carrying a number of papers, passed her, she stopped him and said, timidly:

"I beg your pardon. Monsieur, but can you tell me where I must apply for payment for anything that has been accidentally burned.?"

He replied in a sonorous voice:

"The first door on the left; that is the department you want."

This frightened her still more, and she felt inclined to run away, to make no claim, to sacrifice her eighteen francs. But the idea of that sum revived her courage, and she went upstairs, out of breath, stopping at almost every other step.

She knocked at a door which she saw on the first landing, and a clear voice said, in answer:

"Come in!"

She obeyed mechanically, and found herself in a large room where three solemn gentlemen, each with a decoration in his buttonhole, were standing talking.

One of them asked her: "What do you want, Madame?"

She could hardly get out her words, but stammered: "I have come — I have come on account of an accident, something — "

He very politely pointed out a seat to her.

"If you will kindly sit down I will attend to you in a moment."

And, returning to the other two, he went on with the conversation.

"The company, gentlemen, does not consider that it is under any obligation to you for more than four hundred thousand francs, and we can pay no attention to your claim to the further sum of a hundred thousand, which you wish to make us pay. Besides that, the surveyor's valuation — "

One of the others interrupted him:

"That is quite enough, Monsieur; the law-courts will decide between us, and we have nothing further to do than to take our leave." And they went out after mutual ceremonious bows.

Oh! if she could only have gone away with them, how gladly she would have done it; she would have run away and given up everything. But it was too late, for the gentleman came back, and said, bowing:

"*What can I do for you, Madame?"

She could scarcely speak, but at last she managed to say:

"I have come — for this "

The manager looked at the object which she held out to him in mute astonishment. With trembling fingers she tried to undo the elastic, and succeeded,

after several attempts, and hastily opened the damaged remains of the umbrella.

"It looks to me to be in a very bad state of health," he said, compassionately.

"It cost me twenty francs," she said, with some hesitation.

He seemed astonished. "Really! As much as that ? "

"Yes, it v/as a capital article, and I wanted you to see the state it is in."

"Very well, I see; very well. But I really do not understand what it can have to do with me."

She began to feel uncomfortable; perhaps this company did not pay for such small articles, and she said:

"But — it is burned."

He could not deny iv.

"I see that very well," he rephea.

She remained open-mouthed, not knowing what to say next; then suddenly forgetting that she had left out the main thing, she said hastily:

"I am Mme. Oreille; we are assured in La Maternelle, and I have come to claim the v^^lue of this dajnage. I only want you to have it tecovered," she added quickly, fearing a positive refusal.

The manager was rather embarrassed, and said:

"But, really, Madame, we do not sell umbrellas; we cannot undertake such kinds of repairs."

The little woman felt her courage reviving; she was not going to give up without a struggle; she was not even afraid now, so she said:

"I only want you to pay me the cost of repairing it; I can quite well get it done myself."

The gentleman seemed rather confused.

"Really, Madame, it is such a very small matter! We are never asked to give compensation for such trivial losses. You must allow that we cannot make good pocket-handkerchiefs, gloves, brooms, slippers, all the small articles which are every day exposed to the chances of being burned."

She got red, and felt inclined to fly into a rage.

"But, Monsieur, last December one of our chimneys caught fire, and caused at least five hundred francs' damage. M. Oreille made no claim on the company, and so it is only just that it should pay for my umbrella now."

The manager, guessing that she was telling a lie, said, with a smile:

"You must acknowledge, Madame, that it is very surprising that M. Oreille should have asked no compensation for damages amounting to five hundred francs, and should now claim five or six francs for mending an umbrella."

She was not the least put out, and replied:

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur, the five hundred francs affected M. Oreille's pocket, whereas this damage, amounting to eighteen francs, concerns Mme. Oreille's pocket only, which is a totally different matter."

As he saw that he had no chance of getting rid of her, and that he would only be wasting his time, he said, resignedly:

"Will you kindly tell me how the damage was done?"

She felt that she had won the victory, and said:

"This is how it happened, Monsieur: In our hall there is a bronze stick- and umbrella-stand, and the other day, when I came in, I put my umbrella into it. I must tell you that just above there is a shelf for the candlesticks and matches. I put out my hand, took three or four matches, and struck one,

but it missed fire, so I struck another, which ignited, but went out immediately, and a third did the same."

The manager interrupted her, to make a joke.

"I suppose they were Government matches, then.?"

She did not understand him, and went on:

"Very likely. At any rate, the fourth caught fire, and I lit my candle, and went into my room to go to bed; but in a quarter-of-an-hour I fancied that I smelled something burning, and I have always been terribly afraid of fire. If ever we have an accident it will not be my fault, I assure you. I am terribly nervous since our chimney was on fire, as I told you; so I got up, and hunted about everywhere, sniffing like a dog after game, and at last I noticed that my umbrella was burning. Most likely a match had fallen between the folds and burned it. You can see how it has damaged it."

The manager had taken his cue, and asked her:

"What do you estimate the damage at?"

She did not know what to say, as she was not certain what amount to put on it, but at last she replied:

"Perhaps you had better get it done yourself. I will leave it to you."

He, however, naturally refused.

"No, Madame, I cannot do that. Tell me the amount of your claim, that is all I want to know."

"Well! — I think that — Look here. Monsieur, I do not want to make any money out of you, so I will tell you what we will do. I will take my umbrella to the maker, who will recover it in good, durable silk, and I will bring the bill to you. Will that suit you, Monsieur.?"

"Perfectly, Madame; we will settle it on that basis. Here is a note for the cashier, who will repay you whatever it costs you."

He gave Mme. Oreille a slip of paper. She took it, got up, and went out, thanking him, for she was in a hurry to escape lest he should change his mind.

She went briskly through the streets, looking out for a really good umbrella-maker, and when she found a shop which appeared to be a first-class one, she went in, and said, confidently:

"I want this umbrella recovered in silk, good silk. Use the very best and strongest you have; I don't mind what it costs,"

THE COUNTESS OF AMALFI

Project Gutenberg's *Tales of My Native Town*, by Gabriele D'Annunzio

I

When, one day, toward two o'clock in the afternoon, Don Giovanni Ussorio was about to set his foot on the threshold of Violetta Kutufas' house, Rosa Catana appeared at the head of the stairs and announced in a lowered voice, while she bent her head:

"Don Giovà, the Signora has gone."

Don Giovanni, at this unexpected news, stood dumbfounded, and remained thus for a moment with his eyes bulging and his mouth wide open. While gazing upward as if awaiting further explanations. Since Rosa stood silently at the top of the stairs, twisting an edge of her apron with her hands and dilly-dallying somewhat, he asked at length:

"But tell me why? But tell me why?" And he mounted several steps while he kept repeating with a slight stutter:

"But why? But why?"

"Don Giovà, what have I to tell you? Only that she has gone."

"But why?"

"Don Giovà, I do not know, so there!"

And Rosa took several steps on the landing-place toward the door of the empty apartment. She was rather a thin woman, with reddish hair, and

face liberally scattered with freckles. Her large, ash-coloured eyes had nevertheless a singular vitality. The excessive distance between her nose and mouth gave to the lower part of her face the appearance of a monkey.

Don Giovanni pushed open the partly closed door and passed through the first room, and then the third; he walked around the entire apartment with excited steps; he stopped at the little room, set aside for the bath. The silence almost terrified him; a heavy anxiety weighted down his heart.

“It can’t be true! It can’t be true!” he murmured, staring around confusedly.

The furniture of the room was in its accustomed place, but there was missing from the table under the round mirror, the crystal phials, the tortoise-shell combs, the boxes, the brushes, all of those small objects that assist at the preparation of feminine beauty. In a corner stood a species of large, zinc kettle shaped like a guitar; and within it sparkled water tinted a delicate pink from some essence. The water exhaled subtle perfume that blended in the air with the perfume of cyprus-powder. The exhalation held in it some inherent quality of sensuousness.

“Rosa! Rosa!” Don Giovanni cried, in a voice almost extinguished by the insurmountable anxiety that he felt surging through him.

The woman appeared.

“Tell me how it happened! To what place has she gone? And when did she go? And why?” begged Don Giovanni, making with his mouth a grimace both comic and childish, in order to restrain his grief and force back the tears.

He seized Rosa by both wrists, and thus incited her to speak, to reveal.

“I do not know, Signor,” she answered. “This morning she put her clothes in her portmanteau, sent for Leones’ carriage, and went away without a word. What can you do about it? She will return.”

“Return-n-n!” sobbed Don Giovanni, raising his eyes in which already the tears had started to overflow. “Has she told you when? Speak!” And this last cry was almost threatening and rabid.

“Eh?... to be sure she said to me, ‘Addio, Rosa. We will never see each other again...! But, after all ... who can tell! Everything is possible.’”

Don Giovanni sank dejectedly upon a chair at these words, and set

himself to weeping with so much force of grief that the woman was almost touched by it.

“Now what are you doing, Don Giovà? Are there not other women in this world? Don Giovà, why do you worry about it...?”

Don Giovanni did not hear. He persisted in weeping like a child and hiding his face in Rosa Catana’s apron; his whole body was rent with the upheavals of his grief.

“No, no, no.... I want Violetta! I want Violetta!” he cried.

At that stupid childishness Rosa could not refrain from smiling. She gave assistance by stroking the bald head of Don Giovanni and murmuring words of consolation.

“I will find Violetta for you; I will find her.... So! be quiet! Do not weep any more, Don Giovannino. The people passing can hear. Don’t worry about it, now.”

Don Giovanni, little by little, under the friendly caress, curbed his tears and wiped his eyes on her apron.

“Oh! oh! what a thing to happen!” he exclaimed, after having remained for a moment with his glance fixed on the zinc kettle, where the water glittered now under a sunbeam. “Oh! oh! what luck! Oh!”

He took his head between his hands and swung it back and forth two or three times, as do imprisoned monkeys.

“Now go, Don Giovanino, go!” Rosa Cantana said, taking him gently by the arm and drawing him along.

In the little room the perfume seemed to increase. Innumerable flies buzzed around a cup where remained the residue of some coffee. The reflection of the water trembled on the walls like a subtle net of gold.

“Leave everything just so!” pleaded Don Giovanni of the woman, in a voice broken by badly suppressed sobs. He descended the stairs, shaking his head over his fate. His eyes were swollen and red, bulging from their sockets like those of a mongrel dog.

His round body and prominent stomach overweighted his two slightly inverted legs. Around his bald skull ran a crown of long curling hair that seemed not to take root in the scalp but in the shoulders, from which it climbed upward toward the nape of the neck and the temples. He had the habit of replacing from time to time with his bejewelled hands, some disarranged tuft; the jewels, precious and gaudy, sparkled even on

his thumb, and a cornelian button as large as a strawberry fastened the bosom of his shirt over the centre of his chest.

When he reached the broad daylight of the square, he experienced anew that unconquerable confusion. Several cobblers were working near by and eating figs. A caged blackbird was whistling the hymn of Garibaldi, continuously, always recommencing at the beginning with painful persistency.

“At your service, Don Giovanni!” called Don Domenico Oliva, as he passed, and he removed his hat with an affable Neapolitan cordiality. Stirred with curiosity by the strange expression of the _Signor_, he repassed him in a short time and resaluted him with greater liberality of gesture and affability. He was a man of very long body and very short legs; the habitual expression of his mouth was involuntarily shaped for derision. The people of Pescara called him “Culinterra.”

“At your service!” he repeated.

Don Giovanni, in whom a venomous wrath was beginning to ferment which the laughter of the fig-eaters and the trills of the blackbird irritated, at his second salute turned his back fiercely and moved away, fully persuaded that those salutes were meant for taunts.

Don Domenico, astonished, followed him with these words:

“But, Don Giovà! ... are you angry ... but....”

Don Giovanni did not listen. He walked on with quick steps toward his home. The fruit-sellers and the blacksmiths along the road gazed and could not understand the strange behaviour of these two men, breathless and dripping with perspiration under the noonday sun.

Having arrived at his door, Don Giovanni, scarcely stopping to knock, turned like a serpent, yellow and green with rage, and cried:

“Don Domè, oh Don Domè, I will hit you!” With this threat, he entered his house and closed the door violently behind him.

Don Domenico, dumbfounded, stood for a time speechless. Then he retraced his steps, wondering what could account for this behaviour, when Matteo Verdura, one of the fig-eaters, called:

“Come here! Come here! I have a great bit of news to tell you.”

“What news?” asked the man of the long spine, as he approached.

“Don’t you know about it?”

“About what?”

“Ah! Ah! Then you haven’t heard yet?”

“Heard what?”

Verdura fell to laughing and the other cobblers imitated him. Spontaneously all of them shook with the same rasping and inharmonious mirth, differing only with the personality of each man.

“Buy three cents’ worth of figs and I will tell you.”

Don Domenico, who was niggardly, hesitated slightly, but curiosity conquered him.

“Very well, here it is.”

Verdura called a woman and had her heap up the fruit on a plate. Then he said:

“That signora who lived up there, Donna Violetta, do you remember...? That one of the theatre, do you remember...?”

“Well?”

“She has made off this morning. Crash!”

“Indeed?”

“Indeed, Don Domè.”

“Ah, now I understand!” exclaimed Don Domenico, who was a subtle man and cruelly malicious.

Then, as he wished to revenge himself for the offence given him by Don Giovanni and also to make up for the three cents expended for the news, he went immediately to the _casino_ in order to divulge the secret and to enlarge upon it.

The “casino,” a kind of café, stood immersed in shadow, and up from its tables sprinkled with water, arose a singular odour of dust and musk. There snored Doctor Punzoni, relaxed upon a chair, with his arms dangling. The Baron Cappa, an old soul, full of affection for lame dogs and tender girls, nodded discreetly over a newspaper. Don Ferdinando Giordano moved little flags over a card representing the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian war. Don Settimio de Marinis appraised with Doctor Fiocca the works of Pietro Metastasio, not without many vocal explosions and a certain flowery eloquency in the use of poetical expressions. The notary Gaiulli, not knowing with whom to play,

shuffled the cards of his game alone, and laid them out in a row on the table. Don Paolo Seccia sauntered around the billiard table with steps calculated to assist the digestion.

Don Domenico Oliva entered with so much vehemence, that all turned toward him except Doctor Panzoni, who still remained in the embrace of slumber.

“Have you heard? Have you heard?”

Don Domenico was so anxious to tell the news, and so breathless, that at first he stuttered without making himself understood. All of these gentlemen around him hung upon his words, anticipating with delight any unusual occurrence that might enliven their noonday chatter.

Don Paolo Seccia, who was slightly deaf in one ear, said impatiently, “But have they tied your tongue, Don Domè?”

Don Domenico recommenced his story at the beginning, with more calmness and clearness. He told everything; enlarged on the rage of Don Giovanni Ussorio; added fantastic details; grew intoxicated with his own words as he went on.

“Now do you see? Now do you see?”

Doctor Panzoni, at the noise, opened his eyelids, rolling his huge pupils still dull with sleep and still blowing through the monstrous hairs of his nose, said or rather snorted nasally:

“What has happened? What has happened?”

And with much effort, bearing down on his walking stick, he raised himself very slowly, and joined the gathering in order to hear.

The Baron Cappa now narrated, with much saliva in his mouth, a well-nourished story apropos of Violetta Kutufa. From the pupils of the eyes of his intent listeners gleams flashed in turn. The greenish eyes of Don Palo Seccia scintillated as if bathed in some exhilarating moisture. At last the laughter burst out.

But Doctor Panzoni, though standing, had taken refuge again in slumber; since for him sleep, irresistible as a disease, always had its seat within his own nostrils.

He remained with his snores, alone in the centre of the room, his head upon his breast, while the others scattered over the entire district to carry the news from family to family.

And the news, thus divulged, caused an uproar in Pescara. Toward

evening, with a fresh breeze from the sea and a crescent moon, everybody frequented the streets and squares. The hum of voices was infinite. The name of Violetta Kutufa was at every tongue's end. Don Giovanni Ussorio was not to be seen.

II

Violetta Kutufa had come to Pescara in the month of January, at the time of the Carnival, with a company of singers. She spoke of being a Greek from the Archipelago, of having sung in a theatre at Corfu in the presence of the Greek king, and of having made mad with love an English admiral. She was a woman of plump figure and very white skin. Her arms were unusually round and full of small dimples that became pink with every change of motion; and these little dimples, together with her rings and all of those other graces suitable for a youthful person, helped to make her fleshiness singularly pleasing, fresh and tantalising. The features of her face were slightly vulgar, the eyes tan colour, full of slothfulness; her lips large and flat as if crushed. Her nose did not suggest Greek origin; it was short, rather straight, and with large inflated nostrils; her black hair was luxuriant. She spoke with a soft accent, hesitating at each word, smiling almost constantly. Her voice often became unexpectedly harsh.

When her company arrived, the Pescaraesi were frantic with expectation. The foreign singers were lauded everywhere, for their gestures, their gravity of movement, their costumes, and for every other accomplishment. But the person upon whom all attention centred was Violetta Kutufa.

She wore a kind of dark bolero bordered with fur and held together in front with gilt aiglettes; on her head was a species of toque, all fur, and worn a little to one side. She walked about alone, stepping briskly, entered the shops, treated the shop-keepers with a certain disdain, complained of the mediocrity of their wares, left without making a purchase, hummed with indifference.

Everywhere, in the squares, on all of the walls large hand-bills announced the performance of "The Countess of Amalfi." The name of Violetta Kutufa was resplendent in vermilion letters. The souls of the Pescaraesi kindled. At length the long looked-for evening arrived.

The theatre was in a room of the old military hospital, at the edge of the town near the sea. The room was low, narrow, and as long as a corridor; the stage, of wood with painted scenery, arose a few hands' breadths above the floor; along the side walls was the gallery, consisting of boards over saw-horses covered with tricoloured flags and decorated with festoons. The curtain, a masterpiece of Cucuzzitó, son of Cucuzzitó, depicted tragedy, comedy and music, interwoven, like the

three Graces, and flitting over a bridge under which passed the blue stream of Pescara. The chairs for the theatre, taken from the churches, occupied half of the pit. The benches, taken from the schools, occupied the remaining space.

Toward seven in the evening, the village band started its music on the square, played until it had made the circuit of the town and at length stopped in front of the theatre. The resounding march inspired the souls of passers-by. The women curbed their impatience within the folds of their beautiful silk garments. The room filled up rapidly.

The gallery was radiant with a sparkling aureole of married and unmarried women. Teodolinda Pomarici, a sentimental, lymphatic elocutionist, sat near Fermina Memura, called "The Masculine." The Fusilli girls, arrived from Castellamare, tall maidens with very black eyes, all clothed in a uniform, pink material, with hair braided down their backs, laughed loudly and gesticulated. Emilia d'Annunzio used her beautiful lion-like eyes, with an air of infinite fatigue. Marianina Cortese made signs with her fan to Donna Rachele Profeta who sat in front of her. Donna Rachele Bucci argued with Donna Rachele Carabba on the subjects of speaking tables and spiritualism. The school-mistresses Del Gado, both clothed in changeable silk with mantillas of most antique fashion, and with diverse coiffures glittering with brass spangles, remained silent, compunctious, almost stunned by the novelty of this experience, almost repentant for having come to so profane a spectacle. Costanza Lesbu coughed continuously, shivering under her red shawl, very pale, very blond and very thin.

In the foremost chairs of the pit sat the wealthiest citizens. Don Giovanni Ussorio was most prominent because of his well-groomed appearance, his splendid black and white checkered trousers, his coat of shining wool, his quantity of false jewelry on fingers and shirt-front. Don Antonio Brattella, a member of the Areopagus of Marseilles, a man exhaling importance from every pore and especially from the lobe of his left ear, which was as thick as a green apricot, recited in a loud voice the lyric drama of Giovanni Peruzzini, and his words as they fell from his lips acquired a certain Ciceronian resonance. The auditors, lolling in their chairs, stirred with more or less impatience. Dr. Panzoni wrestled all to no purpose with the wiles of sleep, and from time to time made a noise that blended with the "la" of the tuning instruments.

"Pss! psss! pssss!"

The silence in the theatre grew profound. At the lifting of the curtain the stage was empty. The sound of a Violoncello came from the wings. Tilde appeared and sang. Afterwards Sertorio came out and sang. After him, a crowd of supernumeraries and friends, entered and intoned a song. After them, Tilde drew toward a window and sang:

“Oh how tedious the hours
To the desirous one...!”

In the audience a slight movement was perceptible, since all felt a love duet to be imminent. Tilde, in truth, was a first soprano, none too young; she wore a blue costume, had a blond wig that insufficiently covered her head, and her face, whitened with powder, resembled a raw cutlet besprinkled with flour and partially hidden behind a hempen wig.

Egidio came on. He was the young tenor. As he had a chest singularly hollow and legs slightly curved, he resembled a double-handed spoon upon which hung a calf's head, scraped and polished like those which one sees at times over the butcher-shops. He began:

“Tilde! thy lips are mute,
Thy lowered glances dismay me,
Tell me, why you delay me?
Why do I see thy hand now
A-tremble? Why should that be?”

And Tilde, with great force of sentiment, replied:

“At such a solemn moment, how
Can you ask why of me?”

The duet increased in tenderness. The melody of the cavalier Petrella delighted the ears of the audience. All of the women leaned intently over the rails of the gallery and their faces, throbbing in the green reflection of the flags, were pallid.

“Like a journey from paradise
Death will appear to us.”

Tilde appeared; and now entered, singing, the Duke Carnioli, who was a man fat, fierce, and long haired enough, to be suited to the part of baritone. He sang with many flourishes, running over the syllables, sometimes moreover boldly suppressing.

“Dost thou not know the conjugal chain
Is like lead on the feet?”

But, when in the song, he mentioned at length the Countess of Amalfi, a long applause broke from the audience. The Countess was desired, demanded.

Don Giovanni Ussorio asked of Don Antonio Brattella:

“When is she coming?”

Don Antonio, in a lofty tone, replied:

“Oh! Dio mio, Don Giovà! Don’t you know? In the second act! In the second act!”

The speech of Sertorio was listened to with half-impatience. The curtain fell in the midst of weak applause. Thus began the triumphs of Violetta Kutufa. A prolonged murmur ran through the pit, through the gallery, and increased when the audience heard the blows of the scene-shifters’ hammers behind the curtain. That invisible hustling increased their expectation.

When the curtain went up a kind of spell held the audience in its grip. The scenic effect was marvellous. Three illuminated arches stretched themselves in perspective, and the middle one bordered a fantastic garden.

Several pages were dispersed here and there, and were bowing. The Countess of Amalfi, clothed in red velvet, with her regal train, her arms and shoulders bare, her face ruddy, entered with agitated step and sang:

“It was an evening of ravishment, which still
Fills my soul....”

Her voice was uneven, sometimes twanging, but always powerful and penetrating. It produced on the audience a singular effect after the whine of Tilde. Immediately the audience was divided into two factions; the women were for Tilde, the men for Leonora.

“He who resists my charms
Has not easy matter...!”

Leonora possessed in her personality, in her gestures, her movements, a sauciness that intoxicated and kindled those unmarried men who were accustomed to the flabby Venuses of the lanes of Sant’ Agostino, and to those husbands who were wearied with conjugal monotony.

All gazed at the singer’s every motion, at her large white shoulders, where, with the movements of her round arms, two dimples tried to smile.

At the end of her solo, applause broke forth with a crash. Later, the swooning of the Countess, her dissimulation before the Duke Carnioli (the leader of the duet), the whole scene aroused applause. The heat in the room had become intense; in the galleries fans fluttered confusedly, and among the fans the women’s faces appeared and disappeared.

When the Countess leaned against a column in an attitude of sentimental contemplation, illuminated by the calcium light, and Egidio sang his gentle love song, Don Antonio Brattella called loudly, "She is great!"

Don Giovanni Ussorio, with a sudden impulse, fell to clapping his hands alone. The others shouted at him to be silent, as they wished to hear. Don Giovanni became confused.

"All is for love, everything speaks:
The moon, the zephyrs, the stars, the sea...."

The heads of the listeners swayed with the rhythm of this melody of the Petrella style, even though the voice of Egidio was indifferent; and even though the light was glaring and yellowish their eyes drank in the scene. But when, after this last contrast of passion and seduction, the Countess of Amalfi, walking toward the garden, took up the melody alone, the melody that still vibrated in the minds of all, the delight of the audience had risen to such a height that many raised their heads and inclined them slightly backward as if to trill together with the siren, who was now concealed among the flowers. She sang:

"The bark is now ready ... ah, come beloved!
Is not Love calling ... to live is to love?"

At this climax, Violetta Kutufa made a complete conquest of Don Giovanni Ussorio, who beside himself, seized with a species of passionate, musical madness, clamoured continuously:

"Brava! Brava! Brava!"

Don Paolo Seccia called loudly:

"Oh, see here! see here! Ussorio has gone mad for her!"

All the women gazed at Ussorio, amazed and confused. The school-mistresses Del Gado shook their rosaries under their mantillas. Teodolinda Pomarici remained ecstatic. Only the Fasilli girls, in their red paint, preserved their vivacity, and chattered, shaking their serpentine braids with every movement.

In the third act, neither the dying sighs of Tilde, whom the women defended, nor the rebuffs of Sertorio and Carnioli, nor the songs of the chorus, nor the monologue of the melancholy Egidio, nor the joyfulness of the dames and cavaliers, held any power to distract the public from the preceding voluptuousness.

"Leonora! Leonora! Leonora!" they cried.

Leonora reappeared on the arm of the Count of Lara and descended from a pavilion. Thus she reached the very culmination of her triumph.

She wore now a violet gown, trimmed with silver ribbons and enormous clasps. She turned to the pit, while with her foot she gave a quick, backward stroke to her train, and exposed in the act her instep.

Then, mingling with her words, a thousand charms and a thousand affectations, she sang half-jestingly,

“I am the butterfly that sports within the flowers....”

The public grew almost delirious at this well-known song.

The Countess of Amalfi, on feeling mount up to her the ardent admiration of the men, became intoxicated, multiplied her seductive gestures, and raised her voice to the highest altitude of which she was capable. Her fleshly throat, uncovered, marked with the necklace of Venus, shook with trills.

“I, the bee, who alone on the honey is nourished,
Am inebriate under the blue of the sky....”

Don Giovanni Ussorio stared with so much intensity, that his eyes seemed to start from their sockets. The Baron Cappa was equally enchanted. Don Antonio Brattella, a member of the Areopagus of Marseilles, swelled and swelled, until at length burst from him the exclamation:

“Colossal!”

III

Thus, Violetta Kutufa made a conquest of Pescara. For more than a month performances of the opera of the Cavalier Petrella, continued with ever increasing popularity. The theatre was always full, even packed. Applause for Leonora broke out furiously at the end of every song. A singular phenomenon occurred; the entire population of Pescara seemed seized with a species of musical mania; every Pescarenican soul became inclosed in the magic circle of one single melody, that of the butterfly that sports among the flowers.

In every corner, at every hour, in every way, in every possible variation, on every instrument, with an astounding persistency, that melody was repeated; and the person of Violetta Kutufa became the symbol of those musical strains, just as—God pardon the comparison—the harmony of the organ suggests the soul of paradise.

The musical and lyrical comprehension, which in the southern people is instinctive, expanded at this time without limit. The street gamins whistled everywhere; all the amateur musicians put forth their efforts, Donna Lisitta Menuma played the tune on the harpsichord from dawn until dusk, Don Antonio Brattella played it on the flute, Don Domenico Quaquino, on the clarionette, Don Giacomo Palusci, the priest, on an old rococo spinet, Don Vincenzio Rapagneta on his violoncello, Don Vincenzio Ranieri on the trumpet, Don Nicola d'Annunzio, on his violin. From the towers of Sant' Agostino to the Arsenal, and from Pescheria to Dogana the multifold sounds mingled together and became a discord. In the early hours of the afternoon the district had the appearance of some large hospital for incurable madness. Even the grinders sharpening knives on their wheels tried to maintain a rhythm in the shriek of the metal and the whetstone.

As it was the time of the carnival, a public festival was given in the theatre. Shrove Thursday, at ten in the evening, the room blazed with wax-candles, smelt strongly of myrtle and glittered with mirrors. The masked revellers entered in crowds. Punchinellos predominated. From a platform enveloped in green draperies, marked with constellations of stars of silver paper, the orchestra began to play and Don Giovanni Ussorio entered.

He was dressed like a grandee of Spain, and had the appearance of a very fat Count of Lara. A blue cap with a long, white plume covered his baldness, a short coat of red velvet garnished with gold rippled over his shoulders. This costume accentuated the prominence of his stomach and the skinniness of his legs. His locks, shining with cosmetic oils, resembled an artificial fringe bound around his cap, and they were blacker than usual.

An impertinent Punchinello, on passing him, cried in a disguised voice:

“How funny!”

He made a gesture of horror, so clownish, at this metamorphosis of “Don Giovanni,” that much laughter burst forth from everyone in the vicinity. La Cicarina, all red paint under the black hood of her domino, like a beautiful flower of the flesh, laughed sonorously, while she tripped with two ragged harlequins.

Don Giovanni, filled with anger, lost himself in the crowd and sought Violetta Kutufa. The sarcasms of the other revellers pursued and wounded him. Suddenly he encountered another grandee of Spain, another count of Lara. He recognised Don Antonio Brattella and, at this, received a thrust in the heart. Already, between these two men, rivalry had broken loose.

“How is the medlar?” Don Donato Brandimarte screamed venomously,

alluding to the fleshy protuberance that the member of the Areopagus of Marseilles had on his left ear. Don Giovanni took a fierce pleasure in this insult.

The rivals met face to face, scanned each other from head to foot, and kept their respective stations, the one always slightly withdrawn from the other, as they wandered through the crowd.

At eleven, an agitated flutter passed over the crowd. Violetta Kutufa entered. She was dressed in Mephistophelian costume, in a black domino with long scarlet hood, and with a scarlet mask over her face. The round, swan-like chin, the thick red mouth, shone through her thin veil. The eyes, lengthened and rendered slightly oblique because of the mask, seemed to smile.

All instantaneously recognised her and almost all made way for her; Don Antonio Brattella advanced caressingly on one side. On the other came Don Giovanni; Violetta Kutufa made a hasty survey of the rings that adorned the fingers of the latter, then took the arm of Brattella.

She laughed and walked with a certain sprightly undulation of the hips. Brattella, while talking to her in his customary, silly, vainglorious manner, called her “Contessa,” and interspersed their conversation with the lyrical verses of Giovanni Peruzzini.

She laughed and leaned toward him, and pressed his arm suggestively, since the weaknesses of this ugly, vain man amused her. At a certain point, Brattella, when repeating the words of the Count of Lara in the melodrama of Petrella, said or rather sang submissively:

“Shall I then hope?”

Violetta Kutufa answered in the words of Leonora:

“Who forbids you...? Good-bye.”

Then, seeing Don Giovanni not far away, she detached herself from this bewitching chevalier, and fastened upon the other, who already for some time had pursued with eyes full of envy and dislike, the windings of this couple through the crowd of dancers.

Don Giovanni trembled like a youth under the glance of his first sweetheart. Then, seized with a superabundant pride, he drew the opera singer into the dance. He whirled breathlessly around, with his nose against the woman’s chest, his cloak floating out behind, his plume fluttering to the breeze, streams of perspiration mixed with cosmetic oils filtering down his temples.

Exhausted, he stopped at length. He reeled with giddiness. Two hands

supported him and a sneering voice whispered in his ear, "Don Giovà, stop and recover your breath for a minute!"

The voice was that of Brattella, who in turn drew the fair lady into the dance. He danced, holding his left arm arched over his hips, beating time with his feet, endeavouring to appear as light as a feather, with motions meant to be gracious, but instead so idiotic, and with grimaces so monkey-like, that everywhere the laughter and mockery of the Punchinellos began to pelt down upon him.

"Pay a cent to see it, gentlemen!"

"Here is the bear of Poland that dances like a Christian! Gaze on him, gentlemen!"

"Have a medlar? Have a medlar?"

"Oh, see! See! An orangoutang!"

Don Antonio Brattella controlled himself with much dignity, still continuing his dance. Other couples wheeled around him.

The room was filled with all kinds of people, and in the midst of the confusion the candles burned on, with their reddish flames lighting up the festoons of immortelles. All of this fluttering reflected itself in the mirrors.

La Ciccarina, the daughter of Montagna, the daughter of Suriano, the sisters Montarano, appeared and disappeared, while enlivening the crowd with the beams of their fresh country loveliness. Donna Teodolinda Pomarici, tall and thin, clothed in blue satin, like a madonna, permitted herself to be borne about in a state of transport as her hair, loosened from its bands, waved upon her shoulders. Costanzella Coppe, the most agile and indefatigable of the dancers, and the palest, flew from one extremity of the room to the other in a flash; Amalia Solofra, with hair almost aflame in colour, clothed like a rustic, her audacity almost unequalled, had her silk waist supported by a single band that outlined the connecting point of her arm; and during the dance, at intervals, one could see dark stains under her armpits. Amalia Gagliano, a beautiful, blue-eyed creature, in the costume of a sorceress, resembled an empty coffin walking vertically. A species of intoxication held sway over all these girls. They were fermenting in the warm, dense air, like adulterated wine. The laurel and the immortelles gave out a singular odour, almost ecclesiastical.

The music ceased, now all mounted the stairs leading to the refreshment-room. Don Giovanni Ussorio came to invite Violetta to the banquet. Brattella, to show that he had reached a state of close intimacy with the opera-singer, leaned toward her and whispered

something in her ear, and then fell to laughing about it. Don Giovanni no longer heeded his rival.

“Come, Contessa,” he said, with much ceremony, as he offered his arm.

Violetta accepted. Both mounted the stairs slowly with Don Antonio in the rear.

“I am in love with you!” Don Giovanni hazarded, trying to instil into his voice that note of passion, rendered familiar to him by the principal lover of a dramatic company of Chieti.

Violetta Kutufa did not answer. She was amusing herself by watching the concourse of people near the booth of Andreuccio, who was distributing refreshments, while shouting the prices in a loud voice as if at a country-fair. Andreuccio had an enormous head with polished top, a nose that curved wondrously over the projection of his lower lip; he resembled one of those large paper lanterns in the shape of a human head. The revellers ate and drank with a bestial greediness, scattering on their clothes crumbs of sweet pastry and drops of liquor. On seeing Don Giovanni, Andreuccio cried, “Signor, at your service.”

Don Giovanni had much wealth, and was a widower without blood relations; for which reasons everybody was desirous to be of service to him and to flatter him.

“A little supper,” he answered. “And take care...!” He made an expressive sign to indicate that the thing must be excellent and rare.

Violetta Kutufa sat down, and with a languid effort removed her mask from her face and opened her domino a little. Her face, surrounded by the scarlet hood, and animated with warmth, seemed even more saucy. Through the opening of the domino one saw a species of pink tights that gave a suggestion of living flesh.

“Your health!” exclaimed Don Pompeo Nervi, lingering before the well-furnished table, and seating himself at length, allured by a plate of juicy lobsters.

Then Don Tito de Sieri arrived and took a place without ceremony; also Don Giustino Franco, together with Don Pasquale Virgilio and Don Federico Sicoli appeared. The group of guests at the table continued to swell. After much tortuous tracing and retracing of his steps, even Don Antonio Brattella came finally. These were, for the most part, habitual guests of Don Giovanni; they formed about him a kind of adulatory court, gave their votes to him in the town elections, laughed at every witticism of his, and called him by way of nickname, “The Director.” Don Giovanni introduced them all to Violetta Kutufa. These parasites set themselves to eating with their voracious mouths bent over their

plates.

Every word, every sentence of Don Antonio Brattella was listened to in hostile silence. Every word, every sentence of Don Giovanni, was recognised with complacent smiles and nods of the head. Don Giovanni triumphed in the centre of his court. Violetta Kutufa treated him with affability, now that she felt the force of his gold; and now, entirely free from her hood, with her locks slightly dishevelled on forehead and neck, she indulged in her usual playfulness, somewhat noisy and childish. Around them the crowd moved restlessly.

In the centre of it, three or four harlequins walked on the pavement with their hands and feet, and rolled like great beetles. Amalia Solofra, standing upon a chair, with her long arms bare to the elbows, shook a tambourine. Around her a couple hopped in rustic fashion, giving out short cries, while a group of youths stood looking on with eager eyes. At intervals, from the lower room ascended the voice of Don Ferdinando Giordano, who was ordering the quadrille with great bravado.

“Balance! Forward and back! Swing!”

Little by little Violetta Kutufa’s table became full to overflowing. Don Nereo Pica, Don Sebastiano Pica, Don Grisostomo Troilo and others of this Ussorian court arrived; even to Don Cirillo d’Amelio, Don Camillo d’Angelo and Don Rocco Mattace.

Many strangers stood about with stupid expressions, and watched them eat. Women were envious. From time to time a burst of rough laughter arose from the table, and from time to time corks popped and the foam of wine overflowed.

Don Giovanni took pleasure in splashing his guests, especially the bald ones, in order to make Violetta laugh. The parasites raised their flushed faces, and, still eating, smiled at their “Director” from under the foamy rain. But Don Antonio Brattella, having taken offence, made as if to go. All of the feasters opposite him gave a low cry like a bark.

Violetta called, “Stay.” Don Antonio remained. After this he gave a toast rhyming in quintains. Don Federico Sicoli, half intoxicated, gave a toast likewise in honour of Violetta and of Don Giovanni, in which he went so far as to speak of “divine shape” and “jolly times.” He declaimed in a loud voice. He was a man long, thin and greenish in colour. He lived by composing verses of Saints’ days and laudations for all ecclesiastical festivals. Now, in the midst of his drunkenness, the rhymes fell from his lips without order, old rhymes and new ones. At a certain point, no longer able to balance on his legs, he bent like a candle softened by heat and was silent.

Violetta Kutufa was overcome with laughter. The crowd jammed around the table as if at a spectacle.

“Let us go,” Violetta said at this moment, putting on her mask and hood.

Don Giovanni, at the culmination of his amorous enthusiasm, all red and perspiring, took her arm. The parasites drank the last drop and then arose confusedly behind the couple.

IV

A few days after, Violetta Kutufa was inhabiting an apartment in one of Don Giovanni's houses on the town square, and much hearsay floated through Pescara. The company of singers departed from Brindisi without the Countess of Amalfi. In the solemn, quiet Lenten days, the Pescaraesi took a modest delight in gossip and calumny. Every day a new tale made the circuit of the city, and every day a new creation arose from the popular imagination.

Violetta Kutufa's house was in the neighbourhood of Sant' Agostino, opposite the Brina palace and adjoining the palace of Memma. Every evening the windows were illuminated and the curious assembled beneath them.

Violetta received visitors in a room tapestried with French fabrics on which were depicted in French style various mythological subjects. Two round-bodied vases of the seventeenth century occupied the two sides of the chimney-piece. A yellow sofa extended along the opposite wall between two curtains of similar material. On the chimney-piece stood a plaster Venus and a small Venus di Medici between two gilt candelabra. On the shelves rested various porcelain vases, a bunch of artificial flowers under a crystal globe, a basket of wax fruit, a Swiss cottage, a block of alum, several sea-shells and a cocoanut.

At first her guests had been reluctant, through a sense of modesty, to mount the stairs of the opera singer. Later, little by little, they had overcome all hesitation. Even the most serious men made from time to time their appearance in the _salon_ of Violetta Kutufa; even men of family; and they went there almost with trepidation, with furtive delight, as if they were about to commit a slight crime against their wives, as if they were about to enter a place of soothing perdition and sin. They united in twos and threes, formed alliances for greater security and justification, laughed among themselves and nudged one another in turn for encouragement. Then the stream of light from the windows, the strains from the piano, the song of the Countess of Amalfi, the voices and applause of her guests excited them. They were seized with a sudden enthusiasm, threw out their chests, held up their heads with youthful pride and mounted resolutely, deciding that after

all one had to taste of life and cull opportunities for enjoyment.

But Violetta's receptions had an air of great propriety, were almost formal. She welcomed the new arrivals with courtesy and offered them syrups in water and cordials. The newcomers remained slightly astonished, did not know quite how to behave, where to sit, what to say. The conversations turned upon the weather, on political news, on the substance of the Lenten sermons, on other matter-of-fact and tedious topics.

Don Giuseppe Postiglioni spoke of the pretensions of the Prussian Prince Hohenzollern to the throne of Spain; Don Antonio Brattella delighted in discoursing on the immortality of the soul and other inspiring matters. The doctrine of Brattella was stupendous. He spoke slowly and emphatically, from time to time, pronouncing a difficult word rapidly and eating up the syllables. To quote an authentic report, one evening, on taking a wand and bending it, he said: "Oh, how fleible!" for flexible; another evening, pointing to his plate and making excuses for not being able to play the flute, he vouchsafed: "My entire p-l-ate is inflamed!" and still another evening, on indicating the shape of a vase, he said that in order to make children take medicine, it was necessary to scatter with some sweet substance the _origin_ of the glass.

At intervals Don Paolo Seccia, incredulous soul, on hearing singular matters recounted, jumped up with: "But Don Antò, what do you mean to say?"

Don Antonio repeated his remark with a hand on his heart and a challenging expression, "My testimony is ocular! Entirely ocular." One evening he came, walking with great effort and carefully, painstakingly prepared to sit down; he had "a cold, the length of the spine!" Another evening he arrived with the right cheek slightly bruised; he had fallen "underhand"; in other words, he had slipped and struck his face on the ground. Thus were the conversations of these gatherings made up. Don Giovanni Ussorio, always present, had the airs of a proprietor; every so often he approached Violetta with ostentation and murmured something familiarly in her ear. Long intervals of silence occurred, during which Don Grisostomo Troilo blew his nose and Don Federico Sicoli coughed like a consumptive, holding both hands to his mouth and then shaking them.

The opera-singer revived the conversation with accounts of her triumphs at Corfu, Ancona and Bari. Little by little she grew animated, abandoned herself to her imagination; with discreet reserve she spoke of princely "_amours_" of royal favours, of romantic adventures; she thus evoked all of those confused recollections of novels read at other times, and trusted liberally to the credulity of her listeners. Don Giovanni at these times turned his eyes upon her full of inquietude,

almost bewildered; moreover experiencing a singular irritation that had an indistinct resemblance to jealousy. Violetta at length ended with a stupid smile and the conversation languished anew.

Then Violetta went to the piano and sang. All listened with profound attention; at the end they applauded. Then Don Brattella arose with the flute. An immeasurable melancholy took hold of his listeners at that sound, a kind of swooning of body and soul. They rested with heads lowered almost to their breasts in attitudes of sufferance. At last all left, one after the other. As they took the hand of Violetta a slight scent from the strong perfume of musk remained on their fingers, and this excited them further. Then, once more in the street, they reunited in groups, holding loose discourse. They grew inflamed, lowered their voices and were silent if anyone drew near. Softly they withdrew from beneath the Brina palace to another part of the square. There they set themselves to watching Violetta's windows, still illuminated. Across the panes passed indistinct shadows; at a certain time the light disappeared, traversed two or three rooms and stopped in the last window. Shortly, a figure leaned out to close the shutters. Those spying thought they recognised in it the figure of Don Giovanni. They still continued to discuss beneath the stars and from time to time laughed, while giving one another little nudges, and gesticulating. Don Antonio Brattella, perhaps from the reflection of the city-lamps, seemed a greenish colour. The parasites, little by little in their discourse spit out a certain animosity toward the opera-singer, who was plucking so gracefully their lord of good times. They feared lest those generous feasts might be in peril; already Don Giovanni was more sparing of his invitations.

"It will be necessary to open the eyes of the poor fellow. An adventuress! Bah! She is capable of making him marry her. Why not? And then what a scandal!"

Don Pompeo Nervi, shaking his large calf's head, assented:

"You are right! You are right! We must bethink ourselves."

Don Nereo Pica, "The Cat," proposed a way, conjured up schemes; this pious man, accustomed to the secret and laborious skirmishes of the sacristy was crafty in the sowing of discord.

Thus these complainers treated together and their fat speeches only returned again into their bitter mouths. As it was spring the foliage of the public gardens smelt and trembled before them with white blossoms and through the neighbouring paths they saw, about to disappear, the figures of loosely-dressed prostitutes.

When, therefore, Don Giovanni Ussorio, after having heard from Rosa Catana of the departure of Violetta Kutufa, re-entered his widower's house and heard his parrot humming the air of the butterfly and the bee, he was seized by a new and more profound discouragement.

In the entrance a girdle of sunlight penetrated boldly and through the iron grating one saw the tranquil garden full of heliotropes. His servant slept upon a bench with a straw hat pulled down over his face.

Don Giovanni did not wake the servant. He mounted the stairs with difficulty, his eyes fixed upon the steps, pausing every now and then to mutter: "Oh, what a thing to happen! Oh, oh, what luck!"

Having reached his room he threw himself upon the bed and with his mouth against the pillows, began again to weep. Later he arose; the silence was deep and the trees of the garden as tall as the window waved slightly in the stillness. There was nothing of the unusual in the things about him; he almost wondered at this.

He fell to thinking and remained a long time calling to mind the positions, the gestures, the words, the slightest motions of the deserter. He saw her form as clearly as if she were present. At every recollection his grief increased until at length a kind of dulness benumbed his mind. He remained sitting on the bed, almost motionless, his eyes red, his forehead blackened from the colouring matter of his hair mixed with perspiration, his face furrowed with wrinkles that had suddenly become more evident; he had aged ten years in an hour, a change both amusing and pathetic.

Don Grisostomo Troilo, who had heard the news, arrived. He was a man of advanced age, of short stature and with a round, swollen face from which spread out sharp, thin whiskers, well waxed and resembling the two wings of a bird. He said:

"Now, Giovà, what is the matter?"

Don Giovanni did not answer, but shook his shoulders as if to repel all sympathy. Don Grisostomo then began to reprove him benevolently, never speaking of Violetta Kutufa.

In came Don Cirillo d'Amelio with Don Nereo Pica. Both, on entering, showed almost an air of triumph.

"Now you have seen for yourself, Don Giovà! We told you so! We told you so!" they cried. Both had nasal voices and a cadence acquired from the habit of singing with the organ, because they belonged to the choir of the Holy Sacrament. They began to attack the character of Violetta without mercy. She did this and that and the other thing, they said.

Don Giovanni, outraged, made from time to time a motion as if he would not hear such slanders, but the two continued. Now, also, Don Pasquale Virgilio arrived, with Don Pompeo Nervi, Don Federico Sicoli, Don Tito de Sieri; almost all of the parasites came in a group. Supporting one another they became ferocious. Did he not know that Violetta Kutufa had abandoned herself to Tom, Dick and Harry...? Indeed she had! Indeed! They laid bare the exact particulars, the exact places.

Now Don Giovanni heard with eyes afire, greedy to know, invaded by a terrible curiosity. These revelations instead of disgusting him, fed his desire. Violetta seemed to him more enticing, even more beautiful; and he felt himself inwardly bitten by a raging jealousy that blended with his grief. Presently the woman appeared in his mind's eye associated with a certain soft relaxation. That picture made him giddy.

“Oh Dio! Oh Dio! Oh! Oh!” He commenced to weep again. Those present looked at one another and restrained their laughter. In truth the grief of that man; fleshy, bald, deformed, expressed itself so ridiculously that it seemed unreal.

“Go away now!” Don Giovanni blubbered through his tears.

Don Grisostomo Troilo set the example; the others followed him and chattered as they passed down the stairs.

Toward evening the prostrated man revived little by little. A woman's voice called at his door: “May I come in, Don Giovanni?”

He recognised Rosa Catana's voice and experienced suddenly an instinctive joy. He ran to let her in. Rosa Catana appeared in the dusk of the room.

“Come in! Come in!” he cried. He made her sit down beside him, had her talk to him, asked her a thousand questions. He seemed to suffer less on hearing that familiar voice in which, under the spell of an illusion, he found some quality of Violetta's voice. He took her hands and cried:

“You helped her to dress! Did you not?”

He caressed those rugged hands, closing his eyes and wandering slightly in his mind on the subject of those abundant, unbound locks that so many times he had touched with his hands. Rosa at first did not understand. She believed this to be some sudden passion of Don Giovanni, and withdrew her hands gently, while she spoke in an ambiguous way and laughed. But Don Giovanni murmured:

“No, no!... Stay! You combed her, did you not? You bathed her, did you

not?”

He fell to kissing Rosa's hands, those hands that had combed, bathed and clothed Violetta. He stammered, while kissing them, composed verses so strange that Rosa could scarcely refrain from laughter. But at last she understood and with feminine perception forced herself to remain serious, while she summed up the advantages that might ensue from this foolish comedy. She grew docile, let him caress her, let him call her Violetta, made use of all that experience acquired from peeping through key-holes many times at her mistress's door; she even sought to make her voice more sweet.

In the room one could scarcely see them. Through the open windows a red reflection entered and the trees in the garden, almost black, twisted and turned in the wind. From the sloughs around the arsenal came the hoarse croak of the frogs. The noises of the city street were indistinct.

Don Giovanni drew the woman to his knees, and, completely confused as if he had swallowed some very strong liquor, murmured a thousand childish nothings and babbled on without end, drawing her face close to his.

“Ah, darling little Violetta!” he whispered. “Sweetheart! Don't go away, dear...! If you go away your Nini will die, Poor Nini...! Ban-ban-ban-bannn!”

Thus he continued stupidly, as he had done before with the opera-singer. Rosa Catana patiently offered him slight caresses, as if he were a very sick, perverted child; she took his head and pressed it against her shoulder, kissed his swollen, weeping eyes, stroked his bald crown, rearranged his oiled locks.

VI

Thus, Rosa Catana, little by little, earned her inheritance from Don Giovanni Ussorio, who, in the March of 1871, died of paralysis.

RUSTIC CHIVALRY.

Cavalleria Rusticana

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Under the Shadow of Etna*, by Giovanni Verga

Turiddu Macca, _gnà_ Nunzia's son, after returning from the army, used every Sunday to strut like a peacock through the square in his berseglie uniform and red cap, looking like the fortune-teller as he sets up his stand with his cage of canaries. The girls on their way to Mass gave stolen glances at him from behind their mantellinas, and the urchins buzzed round him like flies.

He had brought back with him, also, a pipe with the king on horseback carved so naturally that it seemed actually alive, and he scratched his matches on the seat of his trousers, lifting his leg as if he were going to give a kick.

But in spite of all this, Lola, the daughter of _massaro_ Angelo, had not shown herself either at Mass or on the balcony, for the reason that she was going to wed a man from Licodia, a carter who had four Sortino mules in his stable.

At first, when Turiddu heard about it, _santo diavolone!_ he threatened to disembowel him, threatened to kill him--that fellow from Licodia! But he did nothing of the sort; he contented himself with going under the fair one's window, and singing all the spiteful songs he knew.

"Has _gnà_ Nunzia's Turiddu nothing else to do," asked the neighbors, "except spending his nights singing like a lone sparrow?"

At length, he met Lola on her way back from the pilgrimage to the Madonna del Pericolo, and when she saw him, she turned neither red nor white, just as if it were none of her affair at all.

"Oh, _compare_ Turiddu, I was told that you returned the first of the month."

"But I have been told of something quite different!" replied the other. "Is it true that you are to marry _compare_ Alfio, the carter?"

"Such is God's will," replied Lola, drawing the two ends of her handkerchief under her chin.

"God's will in your case is done with a snap and a spring; to suit yourself! And it was God's will, was it, that I should return from so far to find this fine state of things, _gnà_ Lola!"

The poor fellow still tried to bluster, but his voice grew hoarse, and he followed the girl, tossing his head so that the tassel of his cap swung from side to side on his shoulders. To tell the truth, she felt really sorry to see him wearing such a long face, but she had not the heart to deceive him with fine speeches.

"Listen, _compare_ Turiddu," she said to him at last, "Let me join my friends. What would be said in town if I were seen with you?"

"You are right," replied Turiddu, "Now that you are going to marry _compare_ Alfio, who has four mules in his stable, it is best not to let people's tongues wag about you. But my mother, poor soul, was obliged to sell our bay mule, and that little plot of vineyard on the highway while I was off in the army. The time 'when Berta spun,' is over and gone, and you no longer think of the time when we used to talk together from the window looking into the yard, and you gave me that handkerchief before I went away, and God knows how many tears I shed into it at going so far that even the name of our place is lost! So good-bye, _gnà_ Lola,--Let's pretend it's rained and cleared off, and our friendship is ended." [12]

[12] _Facemu cuntu ca chioppi e scampau e la nostra amicizia finiu. _

_Gnà Lola married the carter, and on Sundays used to go out on the balcony with her hands crossed on her stomach, to show off all the heavy gold rings that her husband gave to her. Turiddu kept up his habit of going back and forth through the street with his pipe in his mouth, his hands in his pockets, and an air of unconcern, and ogling the girls; but it gnawed his heart that Lola's husband had so much money, and that she pretended not to see him when he passed.

"I'll get even with her, under her very eyes; the vile beast," he muttered.

Opposite _compare_ Alfio lived _massaro_ Cola, the vinedresser, who was as rich as a pig, and had one daughter at home. Turiddu said and did all he could to become _massaro_ Cola's workman, and he began to frequent the house, and make sweet speeches to the girl.

"Why don't you go and say sweet things to _gnà_ Lola?" asked Santa.

"_Gnà Lola is a fine lady. _Gnà Lola has married a crowned king now!"

"I don't deserve crowned kings!"

"You are worth a hundred Lolas, and I know some one who wouldn't look at _la gnà_ Lola or her saint when you are by, for _gnà_ Lola isn't

worthy to wear your shoes, no, she isn't!"

"The fox when he couldn't get at the grapes said, 'How beautiful you are, _racinedda mia_, my little grape!'"

"Ohè! hands off, _compare_ Turiddu!"

"Are you afraid that I will eat you?"

"I'm not afraid of you or of your God."

"Eh! your mother was from Licodia, we all know that! You have quarrelsome blood. Uh! How I could eat you with my eyes!"

"Eat me then with your eyes, for we should not have a crumb left, but meantime help me up with this bundle."

"I would lift up the whole house for you, yes, I would!"

She, so as not to blush, threw at him a stick of wood which was within reach, and by a miracle didn't hit him.

"Let's have done, for chattering never picked grapes."

"If I were rich I should try to get a wife like you, _gnà_ Santa."

"I shall never marry a crowned king like _gnà_ Lola, but I have my dowry as well as she, whenever the Lord shall send me anyone."

"We know you are rich, we know it."

"If you know it, say no more, for father is coming, and I shouldn't like to have him find me in the court-yard."

The old father began to turn up his nose, but the girl pretended not to notice it, because the tassel of the berseglione's cap had set her heart to fluttering, and was constantly dancing before her eyes. When the _babbo_ put Turiddu out of the house, his daughter opened the window for him, and stood chatting with him all the evening long, so that the whole neighborhood talked of nothing else.

"I'm madly in love with you," said Turiddu, "and I am losing my sleep and my appetite."

"How absurd!"

"I wish I were Victor Emmanuel's son, so as to marry you."

"How absurd!"

"By the Madonna, I would eat you like bread!"

"How absurd!"

"Ah! on my honor!"

"Ah! _mamma mia! _"

Lola, who was listening every evening, hidden behind the vase of basil, and turning red and white, one day called Turiddu:--

"And so, _compare_ Turiddu, old friends don't speak to each other any more?"

"_Ma! _" sighed the young man, "blessed is he who can speak to you."

"If you have any desire to speak to me, you know where I live," replied Lola.

Turiddu went to see her so frequently that Santa noticed it, and shut the window in his face. The neighbors looked at him with a smile or with a shake of the head when the bersegliere passed. Lola's husband was making a round of the fairs with his mules.

"Sunday I am going to confession, for last night I dreamed of black grapes," said Lola.

"Put it off, put it off" begged Turiddu.

"No, Easter is coming, and my husband will want to know why I haven't been to confession."

"Ah," murmured _massaro_ Cola's Santa, as she was waiting on her knees before the confessional for her turn, while Lola was making a clean breast of her sins. "On my soul, I will not send you to Rome for your punishment!"

Compare Alfio came home with his mules; he was loaded with money, and he brought to his wife for a present, a handsome new dress for the holidays.

"You are right to bring her gifts," said his neighbor Santa, "because while you are away your wife adorns your house for you."

Compare Alfio was one of those carters who wear their hats over one ear, and when he heard his wife spoken of in such a way he changed color as if he had been knifed.

"_Santo diavolone!_" he exclaimed, "if you haven't seen aright, I will not leave you eyes to weep with, you or your whole family."

"I am not used to weeping!" replied Santa, "I did not weep even when I saw with these eyes _gnà_ Nunzia's Turiddu going into your wife's house at night!"

"It is well," replied _compare_ Alfio, "many thanks!"

Turiddu, now that the cat was at home, no longer went out on the street by day, and he whiled away the tedium at the inn with his friends; and on Easter eve they had on the table a dish of sausages.

When _compare_ Alfio came in, Turiddu realized, merely by the way in which he fixed his eyes on him, that he had come to settle that affair, and he laid his fork on the plate.

"Have you any commands for me, _compare_ Alfio?" he asked.

"No favors to ask, _compare_ Turiddu; it's some time since I have seen you, and I wanted to speak concerning something you know about."

Turiddu at first had offered him a glass, but _compare_ Alfio refused it with a wave of his hand. Then Turiddu got up and said to him,--

"Here I am, _compare_ Alfio."

The carter threw his arms around his neck.

"If to-morrow morning you will come to the prickly pears of la Canziria, we can talk that matter over, _compare_."

"Wait for me on the street at daybreak, and we will go together."

With these words they exchanged the kiss of defiance. Turiddu bit the carter's ear, and thus made the solemn oath not to fail him.

The friends had silently left the sausages, and accompanied Turiddu to his home. _Gnà_ Nunzia, poor creature, waited for him till late every evening.

"Mamma," said Turiddu, "do you remember when I went as a soldier, that you thought I should never come back any more? Give me a good kiss as you did then, for to-morrow morning I am going far away."

Before daybreak he got his spring-knife, which he had hidden under the hay, when he had gone to serve his time in the army, and started for the prickly-pear trees of la Canziria.

"Oh, Gesummaria! where are you going in such haste!" cried Lola in great apprehension, while her husband was getting ready to go out.

"I am not going far," replied _compare_ Alfio. "But it would be better for you if I never came back."

Lola in her nightdress was praying at the foot of the bed, and pressing to her lips the rosary which Fra Bernardino had brought to her from the Holy places, and reciting all the Ave Marias that she could say.

"_Compare_ Alfio," began Turiddu, after he had gone a little distance by the side of his companion, who walked in silence with his cap down over his eyes, "as God is true I know that I have done wrong, and I should let myself be killed. But before I came out, I saw my old mother, who got up to see me off, under the pretence of tending the hens. Her heart had a presentiment, and as the Lord is true, I will kill you like a dog, so that my poor old mother may not weep."

"All right," replied _compare_ Alfio, stripping off his waistcoat. "Then we will both of us hit hard."

Both of them were skilful fencers. Turiddu was first struck, and was quick enough to receive it in the arm. When he returned it, he returned it well, and wounded the other in the groin.

"Ah, _compare_ Turiddu! so you really intend to kill me, do you?"

"Yes, I gave you fair warning; since I saw my old mother in the hen-yard, it seems to me I have her all the time before my eyes."

"Keep them well open, those eyes of yours," cried _compare_ Alfio, "for I am going to give you back good measure."

As he stood on guard, all doubled up, so as to keep his left hand on his wound, which pained him, and almost trailing his elbow on the ground, he swiftly picked up a handful of dust, and flung it into his adversary's eyes.

"Ah!" screamed Turiddu, blinded, "I am dead."

He tried to save himself, by making desperate leaps backwards, but _compare_ Alfio overtook him with another thrust in the stomach, and a third in the throat.

"And that makes three! that is for the house which you have adorned for me! Now your mother will let the hens alone."

Turiddu staggered a short distance among the prickly pears, and then

fell like a stone. The blood foaming, gurgled in his throat, and he could not even cry, "_Ah! mamma mia!_"

THE SNOW WIND

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Tales of the Wilderness*, by Boris Pilniak

A cruel, biting blizzard swept across the snow; over the earth moved misty, fantastic clouds, that drifted slowly across the face of a pale troubled moon. Towards night-fall, the wolves could be heard in the valley, howling a summons to their leader from the spot where the pack always assembled.

The valley descended sharply to a hollow thickly overgrown with red pines. Thirteen years back an unusually violent storm had swept the vicinity, and hurled an entire pine belt to the ground. Now, under the wide, windy sky, spread a luxuriant growth of young firs, while little oaks, hazels, and alders here and there dotted the depression.

Here the leader of the wolf-pack had his lair. Here for thirteen years his mate had borne his cubs. He was already old, but huge, strong, greedy, ferocious, and fearless, with lean legs, powerful snapping jaws, a short, thick neck on which the hair stood up shaggily like a short mane and terrified his younger companions.

This great, gaunt old wolf had been leader for seven years, and with good reason. By day he kept to his lair. At night, terrible and relentless, he prowled the fields and growled a short summons to his mates. He led the pack on their quests for food, hunting throughout the night, racing over plains and down ravines, ravening round farms and villages. He not only slew elks, horses, bulls, and bears, but also his own wolves if they were impudent or rebellious. He lived--as every wolf must live--to hunt, to eat, and to breed.

In winter the snow lay over the land like a dead white pall, and food was scarce. The wolves sat round in a circle, gnashed their teeth, and wailed long and plaintively through the night, their noses pointed at the moon.

Five days back, on a steep slope of the valley not far from the wolf track to a watering place, and close to a belt of young fir-trees surrounded by a snow-topped coppice, some men from a neighbouring farm had set a powerful wolf-trap, above which they had thrown a dead calf. On their nocturnal prowls the wolves discovered the carcass. For a long time they sat round it in the grey darkness, howling plaintively, hungrily gnashing their fangs, afraid to move nearer,

and each one timidly jostling the other forward with cruel vicious eyes.

At last one young wolf's hunger overcame his fear; he threw himself on the calf with a shrill squeal, and after him rushed the rest, whining, growling, raising their tails, bending their bony backs, bristling the hair on their short thick necks--and into the trap fell the leader's mate.

They paid no attention to her, but eagerly devoured the calf, and it was only when they had finished and cleared away all traces of the orgy that they realised the she-wolf was trapped there for good.

All night she howled and threw herself about, saliva falling from her dripping jaws, her eyes rolling wildly and emitting little sparks of green fire as she circled round and round on a clanking chain. In the morning two farm-hands arrived, threw her on their sleigh and drove away.

The leader remained alone the whole day. Then, when night again returned, he called his band together, tore one young wolf to pieces, rushed round with lowered head and bristling hair, finally leaving the pack and returning to his lair. The wolves submitted to his terrible punishment, for he was their chief, who had seized power by force, and they patiently awaited his return, thinking he had gone on a solitary food-hunt.

But as the night advanced and he did not come, they began to howl their urgent summons to him, and now there was an undercurrent of menace in their cries, the lust to kill, for the code of the wild beasts prescribed only one penalty for the leader who deserted his pack--death!

II

All through that night, and the following days and nights, the old wolf lay immovable in his lair. At last, with drooping head, he rose from his resting-place, stretched himself mournfully, first on his fore-paws, then on his hind-legs, arched his back, gnashed his fangs and licked the snow with his clotted tongue. The sky was still shrouded in a dense, velvety darkness: the snow was hard, and glittered like a million points of white light. The moon--a dark red orb--was blotted over with ragged masses of inky clouds and was fast disappearing on the right of the horizon; on the left, a crimson dawn full of menace was slowly breaking. The snow-wind blew and whistled overhead. Around the wolf, under a bleak sky, were fallen pines and little fir trees cloaked with snow.

He moved up to a lone, naked waste above the valley, emerged from the

wood, and stood with lowered head by its border, listening and sniffing. Here the wind blew more strongly, the trees cracked and groaned, and from the wide dark expanse of open country came a sense of dreary emptiness and bitter cold.

The old wolf raised his head, pointed his nose, and uttered a prolonged howl. There was no answer. Then he sped to the watering place and to the river, to the place where his mate had perished.

He loped along swiftly, noiselessly, crouching on the earth, unnoticeable but for his glistening eyes, which made him terrible to encounter suddenly.

From a hill by the riverside a village could be descried, its mole-like windows already alight, and not far distant loomed the dark silhouette of a lonely farm.

The wolf prowled aimlessly through the quiet, snow-covered fields. Although it was a still, dark night, the blue lights of the approaching dawn proclaimed that March had already come. The gale blew fiercely and biting, driving the snow in swirls and spirals before it.

All was smooth at the place where the trap had been set; there was not a trace of the recent death, even the snow round the trap had been flattened out. The very scent of the she-wolf had been almost entirely blown away. The wolf again raised his head and uttered a deep, mournful howl; the moonlight was reflected in his expressionless eyes, which were filled with little tears, then he lowered his head to the earth and was silent.

A light twinkled in the farm-house windows. The wolf went towards it, his eyes gleaming with vicious green sparks. The dogs scented him and began a loud, terrified barking. The wolf lay in the snow and howled back loudly. The red moon was swimming towards the horizon, and swift murky clouds glided over it. Here by the river-side, and down at the watering-place, in the great primeval woods and in the valleys, this wolf had lived for thirteen years. Now his mate lay in the yard of yonder farm-house. He howled again. A man came out into the yard and shouted savagely, thinking a pack of wolves were approaching.

The night passed, but the wolf still wandered aimlessly, his broad head drooping, his ferocious eyes glaring. The moon sank, slanting and immense, behind the horizon, the dawn-light increased, a universal murmuring filled the air, shadowy vistas of pine-trees, firs and frowning ravines began to open up in all directions. The morning glow deepened into rivers and floods of delicate, interchanging colour. Under the protean play the snow changed its dress to lilac. The wolf withdrew to its lair.

By the fallen pine trees where grew delicate green firs, fat, clumsy little cubs, born earlier in the spring, played among the cones and the belt of young spruces that guarded the entrance to their lair.

III

The morning came, its clear blue bringing an assurance that it was March to those desolate places lying in lonely grandeur beneath a smiling sky. It whispered that the winter was passed and that spring had come. Soon the snow would melt and the sodden earth would throb and pulse with vernal activity, and it would be impossible not to rejoice with Nature.

The snow thickened into a grey shining crust under the warm rays of the sun, to deepen into blue where the shadows fell. The fir-trees, shaggy and formidable, seemed especially verdant and welcoming to the tide of sunlight that flowed to their feet, and lay there collected in the little hollows about their roots. The woodpecker could be heard amidst the pines, and daws, tomtits and bullfinches carolled merrily as they spread their wings and preened their plumage in the sun. The pines exhaled their pungent, resinous, exhilarating odour.

The wolf lay under cover all day. His bed was bestrewn with decaying foliage and overgrown with moss. He rested his head on his paws, gazing solemnly before him with small tear-stained eyes; he lay there motionless, feeling a great weariness and melancholy. Around him was a thick cluster of firs overspread with snow.

Twice the old wolf raised his head, opened his jaws wide and gave a bitter plaintive whine; then his eyes grew dim, their ferocity died down, and he wagged his tail like a cub, striking a thick branch a sharp blow with it. Then again he relapsed into melancholy immobility.

At last, as the day declined, as the naming splendour of the dying sun sailed majestically towards the west and sank beneath the horizon in a glory of spilled violets and purples, and as the moon uprose, a huge, glowing lantern of light, the old wolf for the first time showed himself angry and restless. He emerged from his cover and commenced a loud howling, fiercely bristling his hair; then he sat on his hind-legs and whined as though in great pain, again, as if driven wild by this agony, he began to scatter and gnaw at the snow. Finally at a swift pace, and crouching, he fled into the fields, to the neighbourhood of the farm near which the wolf-traps were laid.

Here it was dark and cold, the snow-wind rose afresh, harsh and violent, and the crusted snow cut the animal's feet. The last scent of the she-wolf, which he had sniffed only the previous day, had

completely disappeared. In some remote part of the valley the pack were howling in rage and hunger for their leader.

Tossing himself about and howling, the old wolf rushed madly over hill and hollow. The night passed; he dashed about the fields and valleys, went down to the river, ran into the deep fastness of the forest and whined ferociously, for there was nothing left for him to do. He had lived to eat and to breed. Man, by an iron trap, had severed him from the law; now he knew only death awaited him.

* * * * *

IV

While it was yet quite dark, a farm-hand rose from his warm bed to go to the village on business. He put on a wadded jacket and fur-lined cap, lighted a pipe--the glow illuminating his pock-marked hands--and went out into the yard. The dogs leaped round him, uttering timid cowardly whines. He grinned, kicked them aside, and opened the gate.

Outside darkness had descended softly from the heavens, and lovingly overspread a tired world; greenish clouds floated through the blue-black sea of naked space and the snow gleamed greyish blue beneath a turbid moon. The keen snow-wind swept the ground in a fury of white swirls.

The man glanced up at the sky, whistled, and strode off to the village at a brisk swinging pace. He did not mark a wolf stealing along close by the road and running on ahead of him. But when he was near the village he came to a sudden halt. There, on the road in front of him, a huge, lean, much-scarred wolf sat on its hind legs by a crossway. With hideous, baleful green eyes it watched his approach. The man whistled, and waved his arm. The wolf did not stir: its eyes grew dim for a moment; then lighted up again with a cruel ferocious glare.

The man struck a match and took a few steps forward: still the wolf did not stir. Then the man halted, the smile left his face, and he looked anxiously about him. All around stretched fields, the village was yet in the distance. He made a snow-ball and flung it ingratiatingly at the wolf. The brute remained still, only champing its jaws and bristling the hair on its neck.

A moment the man remained there; then turned back. He walked slowly at first; then he began to run. Faster and faster he flew; but, as he neared his farm, he beheld the wolf again on the road before him. It was once more sitting on its haunches, and it licked its dripping jaws. Now terror seized the unfortunate peasant. He shouted; then wheeled, and ran back blindly. He shrieked wildly as he ran--mad with

fear, unaware what he was doing. There was a death-like hush over the snow-laden earth that lay supine beneath the cloud-ridden moon. The frenzied man alone was screaming.

Gasping, staggering, with froth on his lips, he reached the village at last. There stood the wolf! He dashed from the road tossing his arms, uttering hoarse terrified cries; his cap had fallen off long before, his hair and red scarf were streaming in the wind. Behind him came the relentless pad, pad of the wolf; it's hot, fetid breath scorched the nape of his neck; he could hear it snapping its jaws. He stumbled, lurched forward, fell: as he was about to lift himself from the deep spongy snow, the wolf leaped upon him and struck him from behind--a short, powerful blow on the neck.

The man fell--to rise no more! A moment, and then his horrible choking cries had ceased. Through the vastness rang the wolf's savage, solitary howling.

V

At dusk when the snow-wind was rushing through the darkness of the night--a wild turbulent cataract of icy air--the wolf-pack gathered together in the valley and howled. They were calling for a leader.

The sky spread above them, wan and pallid, the wind moaned and whistled through the feathery tops of the pine-trees. Amid the snow the wolves sat in a circle on their haunches and howled dismally. They were hungry and had not eaten for six days; their leader had deserted them. He who had led them on their hunts and prowls, who seven years back had killed their former leader and established his own chieftainship, had now left them forlorn.

Sitting in a circle, howling with gleaming eyes and bristling hair, they were mournful yet vicious; like helpless slaves they did not know what to do. Only one young wolf, a brother of the one their leader had recently killed, strutted about independently and gnashed his teeth, conscious of his strength and agility. In the pride of his youthful vigour he had conceived the ambition to make himself the leader; he certainly had no thought that this was a fatal step entailing in the end his doom. For it is the Law of the Pack that death is meted out to the usurper of power. He commenced to howl proudly, but the others paid no heed, they only drooped their heads and howled in fear and trembling.

Gradually the dawn broke. Faint and silvery, the moon was sinking through pale, luminous veils in the west; in the east there glowed a fierce red light like that of a camp fire. The sky was still shrouded in darkness, the snow glimmered a cold pallid blue in the half-light.

The old wolf, fresh from his kill, slowly descended the valley where his pack had gathered. At sight of his grey, gaunt form they rushed forward to meet him, and as they ran none seemed to know what was about to happen; they advanced fawning and cringing until the young wolf, with a savage squeal, dared to throw himself upon the leader in a sudden fierce attack: then they all suddenly remembered his desertion of them, their law which demands death for its infringement, and with glistening bared teeth they too flung themselves upon him. He made no resistance. He died and was torn to pieces which, with his bones, were quickly devoured.

* * * * *

VI

The leader died seven days after the death of his mate.

A week later, beneath a golden sun and a smiling blue sky, the snow was melting, cleansing the earth for the breath of spring. Streamlets became abundant, twining like shining ribbons of molten light through the fields and valleys, the river grew swollen and turbid, becoming a fierce impassable flood, and the little fir trees grew still more feathery and verdant.

The young wolf, like the old one before him, now became leader and took a mate; she was the daughter of the old leader, and she went into the cover to breed.

LOVE, FAITH AND HOPE

Project Gutenberg's *The Crushed Flower and Other Stories*, by Leonid Andreyev

He loved.

According to his passport, he was called Max Z. But as it was stated in the same passport that he had no special peculiarities about his features, I prefer to call him Mr. N+1. He represented a long line of young men who possess wavy, dishevelled locks, straight, bold, and open looks, well-formed and strong bodies, and very large and powerful hearts.

All these youths have loved and perpetuated their love. Some of them have succeeded in engraving it on the tablets of history, like Henry IV; others, like Petrarch, have made literary preserves of it; some have availed themselves for that purpose of the newspapers, wherein the happenings of the day are recorded, and where they figured among those

who had strangled themselves, shot themselves, or who had been shot by others; still others, the happiest and most modest of all, perpetuated their love by entering it in the birth records--by creating posterity.

The love of N+1 was as strong as death, as a certain writer put it; as strong as life, he thought.

Max was firmly convinced that he was the first to have discovered the method of loving so intensely, so unrestrainedly, so passionately, and he regarded with contempt all who had loved before him. Still more, he was convinced that even after him no one would love as he did, and he felt sorry that with his death the secret of true love would be lost to mankind. But, being a modest young man, he attributed part of his achievement to her--to his beloved. Not that she was perfection itself, but she came very close to it, as close as an ideal can come to reality.

There were prettier women than she, there were wiser women, but was there ever a better woman? Did there ever exist a woman on whose face was so clearly and distinctly written that she alone was worthy of love--of infinite, pure, and devoted love? Max knew that there never were, and that there never would be such women. In this respect, he had no special peculiarities, just as Adam did not have them, just as you, my reader, do not have them. Beginning with Grandmother Eve and ending with the woman upon whom your eyes were directed--before you read these lines--the same inscription is to be clearly and distinctly read on the face of every woman at a certain time. The difference is only in the quality of the ink.

A very nasty day set in--it was Monday or Tuesday--when Max noticed with a feeling of great terror that the inscription upon the dear face was fading. Max rubbed his eyes, looked first from a distance, then from all sides; but the fact was undeniable--the inscription was fading. Soon the last letter also disappeared--the face was white like the recently whitewashed wall of a new house. But he was convinced that the inscription had disappeared not of itself, but that some one had wiped it off. Who?

Max went to his friend, John N. He knew and he felt sure that such a true, disinterested, and honest friend there never was and never would be. And in this respect, too, as you see, Max had no special peculiarities. He went to his friend for the purpose of taking his advice concerning the mysterious disappearance of the inscription, and found John N. exactly at the moment when he was wiping away that inscription by his kisses. It was then that the records of the local occurrences were enriched by another unfortunate incident, entitled "An Attempt at Suicide."

.....

It is said that death always comes in due time. Evidently, that time had not yet arrived for Max, for he remained alive--that is, he ate, drank, walked, borrowed money and did not return it, and altogether he showed by a series of psycho-physiological acts that he was a living being, possessing a stomach, a will, and a mind--but his soul was dead, or, to be more exact, it was absorbed in lethargic sleep. The sound of human speech reached his ears, his eyes saw tears and laughter, but all that did not stir a single echo, a single emotion in his soul. I do not know what space of time had elapsed. It may have been one year, and it may have been ten years, for the length of such intermissions in life depends on how quickly the actor succeeds in changing his costume.

One beautiful day--it was Wednesday or Thursday--Max awakened completely. A careful and guarded liquidation of his spiritual property made it clear that a fair piece of Max's soul, the part which contained his love for woman and for his friends, was dead, like a paralysis-stricken hand or foot. But what remained was, nevertheless, enough for life. That was love for and faith in mankind. Then Max, having renounced personal happiness, started to work for the happiness of others.

That was a new phase--he believed.

All the evil that is tormenting the world seemed to him to be concentrated in a "red flower," in one red flower. It was but necessary to tear it down, and the incessant, heart-rending cries and moans which rise to the indifferent sky from all points of the earth, like its natural breathing, would be silenced. The evil of the world, he believed, lay in the evil will and in the madness of the people. They themselves were to blame for being unhappy, and they could be happy if they wished. This seemed so clear and simple that Max was dumfounded in his amazement at human stupidity. Humanity reminded him of a crowd huddled together in a spacious temple and panic-stricken at the cry of "Fire!"

Instead of passing calmly through the wide doors and saving themselves, the maddened people, with the cruelty of frenzied beasts, cry and roar, crush one another and perish--not from the fire (for it is only imaginary), but from their own madness. It is enough sometimes when one sensible, firm word is uttered to this crowd--the crowd calms down and imminent death is thus averted. Let, then, a hundred calm, rational voices be raised to mankind, showing them where to escape and where the danger lies--and heaven will be established on earth, if not immediately, then at least within a very brief time.

Max began to utter his word of wisdom. How he uttered it you will learn later. The name of Max was mentioned in the newspapers, shouted in the market places, blessed and cursed; whole books were written on what Max N+1 had done, what he was doing, and what he intended to do. He appeared

here and there and everywhere. He was seen standing at the head of the crowd, commanding it; he was seen in chains and under the knife of the guillotine. In this respect Max did not have any special peculiarities, either. A preacher of humility and peace, a stern bearer of fire and sword, he was the same Max--Max the believer. But while he was doing all this, time kept passing on. His nerves were shattered; his wavy locks became thin and his head began to look like that of Elijah the Prophet; here and there he felt a piercing pain....

The earth continued to turn light-mindedly around the sun, now coming nearer to it, now retreating coquettishly, and giving the impression that it fixed all its attention upon its household friend, the moon; the days were replaced by other days, and the dark nights by other dark nights, with such pedantic German punctuality and correctness that all the artistic natures were compelled to move over to the far north by degrees, where the devil himself would break his head endeavouring to distinguish between day and night--when suddenly something happened to Max.

Somehow it happened that Max became misunderstood. He had calmed the crowd by his words of wisdom many a time before and had saved them from mutual destruction but now he was not understood. They thought that it was he who had shouted "Fire!" With all the eloquence of which he was capable he assured them that he was exerting all his efforts for their sake alone; that he himself needed absolutely nothing, for he was alone, childless; that he was ready to forget the sad misunderstanding and serve them again with faith and truth--but all in vain. They would not trust him. And in this respect Max did not have any special peculiarities, either. The sad incident ended for Max in a new intermission.

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Max was alive, as was positively established by medical experts, who had made a series of simple tests. Thus, when they pricked a needle into his foot, he shook his foot and tried to remove the needle. When they put food before him, he ate it, but he did not walk and did not ask for any loans, which clearly testified to the complete decline of his energy. His soul was dead--as much as the soul can be dead while the body is alive. To Max all that he had loved and believed in was dead. Impenetrable gloom wrapped his soul. There were neither feelings in it, nor desires, nor thoughts. And there was not a more unhappy man in the world than Max, if he was a man at all.

But he was a man.

According to the calendar, it was Friday or Saturday, when Max awakened as from a prolonged sleep. With the pleasant sensation of an owner to whom his property has been restored which had wrongly been taken from

him, Max realised that he was once more in possession of all his five senses.

His sight reported to him that he was all alone, in a place which might in justice be called either a room or a chimney. Each wall of the room was about a metre and a half wide and about ten metres high. The walls were straight, white, smooth, with no openings, except one through which food was brought to Max. An electric lamp was burning brightly on the ceiling. It was burning all the time, so that Max did not know now what darkness was. There was no furniture in the room, and Max had to lie on the stone floor. He lay curled together, as the narrowness of the room did not permit him to stretch himself.

His sense of hearing reported to him that until the day of his death he would not leave this room.... Having reported this, his hearing sank into inactivity, for not the slightest sound came from without, except the sounds which Max himself produced, tossing about, or shouting until he was hoarse, until he lost his voice.

Max looked into himself. In contrast to the outward light which never went out he saw within himself impenetrable, heavy, and motionless darkness. In that darkness his love and faith were buried.

Max did not know whether time was moving or whether it stood motionless. The same even, white light poured down on him--the same silence and quiet. Only by the beating of his heart Max could judge that Chronos had not left his chariot. His body was aching ever more from the unnatural position in which it lay, and the constant light and silence were growing ever more tormenting. How happy are they for whom night exists, near whom people are shouting, making noise, beating drums; who may sit on a chair, with their feet hanging down, or lie with their feet outstretched, placing the head in a corner and covering it with the hands in order to create the illusion of darkness.

Max made an effort to recall and to picture to himself what there is in life; human faces, voices, the stars.... He knew that his eyes would never in life see that again. He knew it, and yet he lived. He could have destroyed himself, for there is no position in which a man can not do that, but instead Max worried about his health, trying to eat, although he had no appetite, solving mathematical problems to occupy his mind so as not to lose his reason. He struggled against death as if it were not his deliverer, but his enemy; and as if life were to him not the worst of infernal tortures--but love, faith, and happiness. Gloom in the Past, the grave in the Future, and infernal tortures in the Present--and yet he lived. Tell me, John N., where did he get the strength for that?

He hoped.

MARRIAGE A LA MODE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Garden Party*, by Katherine Mansfield

On his way to the station William remembered with a fresh pang of disappointment that he was taking nothing down to the kiddies. Poor little chaps! It was hard lines on them. Their first words always were as they ran to greet him, "What have you got for me, daddy?" and he had nothing. He would have to buy them some sweets at the station. But that was what he had done for the past four Saturdays; their faces had fallen last time when they saw the same old boxes produced again.

And Paddy had said, "I had red ribbing on mine bee-fore!"

And Johnny had said, "It's always pink on mine. I hate pink."

But what was William to do? The affair wasn't so easily settled. In the old days, of course, he would have taken a taxi off to a decent toyshop and chosen them something in five minutes. But nowadays they had Russian toys, French toys, Serbian toys--toys from God knows where. It was over a year since Isabel had scrapped the old donkeys and engines and so on because they were so "dreadfully sentimental" and "so appallingly bad for the babies' sense of form."

"It's so important," the new Isabel had explained, "that they should like the right things from the very beginning. It saves so much time later on. Really, if the poor pets have to spend their infant years staring at these horrors, one can imagine them growing up and asking to be taken to the Royal Academy."

And she spoke as though a visit to the Royal Academy was certain immediate death to any one...

"Well, I don't know," said William slowly. "When I was their age I used to go to bed hugging an old towel with a knot in it."

The new Isabel looked at him, her eyes narrowed, her lips apart.

"Dear William! I'm sure you did!" She laughed in the new way.

Sweets it would have to be, however, thought William gloomily, fishing in his pocket for change for the taxi-man. And he saw the kiddies handing the boxes round--they were awfully generous little chaps--while Isabel's precious friends didn't hesitate to help themselves...

What about fruit? William hovered before a stall just inside the station. What about a melon each? Would they have to share that, too? Or a pineapple, for Pad, and a melon for Johnny? Isabel's friends could hardly go sneaking up to the nursery at the children's meal-times. All

the same, as he bought the melon William had a horrible vision of one of Isabel's young poets lapping up a slice, for some reason, behind the nursery door.

With his two very awkward parcels he strode off to his train. The platform was crowded, the train was in. Doors banged open and shut. There came such a loud hissing from the engine that people looked dazed as they scurried to and fro. William made straight for a first-class smoker, stowed away his suit-case and parcels, and taking a huge wad of papers out of his inner pocket, he flung down in the corner and began to read.

"Our client moreover is positive... We are inclined to reconsider... in the event of--" Ah, that was better. William pressed back his flattened hair and stretched his legs across the carriage floor. The familiar dull gnawing in his breast quietened down. "With regard to our decision--" He took out a blue pencil and scored a paragraph slowly.

Two men came in, stepped across him, and made for the farther corner. A young fellow swung his golf clubs into the rack and sat down opposite. The train gave a gentle lurch, they were off. William glanced up and saw the hot, bright station slipping away. A red-faced girl raced along by the carriages, there was something strained and almost desperate in the way she waved and called. "Hysterical!" thought William dully. Then a greasy, black-faced workman at the end of the platform grinned at the passing train. And William thought, "A filthy life!" and went back to his papers.

When he looked up again there were fields, and beasts standing for shelter under the dark trees. A wide river, with naked children splashing in the shallows, glided into sight and was gone again. The sky shone pale, and one bird drifted high like a dark fleck in a jewel.

"We have examined our client's correspondence files... " The last sentence he had read echoed in his mind. "We have examined... " William hung on to that sentence, but it was no good; it snapped in the middle, and the fields, the sky, the sailing bird, the water, all said, "Isabel." The same thing happened every Saturday afternoon. When he was on his way to meet Isabel there began those countless imaginary meetings. She was at the station, standing just a little apart from everybody else; she was sitting in the open taxi outside; she was at the garden gate; walking across the parched grass; at the door, or just inside the hall.

And her clear, light voice said, "It's William," or "Hillo, William!" or "So William has come!" He touched her cool hand, her cool cheek.

The exquisite freshness of Isabel! When he had been a little boy, it was his delight to run into the garden after a shower of rain and shake the

rose-bush over him. Isabel was that rose-bush, petal-soft, sparkling and cool. And he was still that little boy. But there was no running into the garden now, no laughing and shaking. The dull, persistent gnawing in his breast started again. He drew up his legs, tossed the papers aside, and shut his eyes.

“What is it, Isabel? What is it?” he said tenderly. They were in their bedroom in the new house. Isabel sat on a painted stool before the dressing-table that was strewn with little black and green boxes.

“What is what, William?” And she bent forward, and her fine light hair fell over her cheeks.

“Ah, you know!” He stood in the middle of the room and he felt a stranger. At that Isabel wheeled round quickly and faced him.

“Oh, William!” she cried imploringly, and she held up the hair-brush: “Please! Please don't be so dreadfully stuffy and--tragic. You're always saying or looking or hinting that I've changed. Just because I've got to know really congenial people, and go about more, and am frightfully keen on--on everything, you behave as though I'd--” Isabel tossed back her hair and laughed--“killed our love or something. It's so awfully absurd”--she bit her lip--“and it's so maddening, William. Even this new house and the servants you grudge me.”

“Isabel!”

“Yes, yes, it's true in a way,” said Isabel quickly. “You think they are another bad sign. Oh, I know you do. I feel it,” she said softly, “every time you come up the stairs. But we couldn't have gone on living in that other poky little hole, William. Be practical, at least! Why, there wasn't enough room for the babies even.”

No, it was true. Every morning when he came back from chambers it was to find the babies with Isabel in the back drawing-room. They were having rides on the leopard skin thrown over the sofa back, or they were playing shops with Isabel's desk for a counter, or Pad was sitting on the hearthrug rowing away for dear life with a little brass fire shovel, while Johnny shot at pirates with the tongs. Every evening they each had a pick-a-back up the narrow stairs to their fat old Nanny.

Yes, he supposed it was a poky little house. A little white house with blue curtains and a window-box of petunias. William met their friends at the door with “Seen our petunias? Pretty terrific for London, don't you think?”

But the imbecile thing, the absolutely extraordinary thing was that he hadn't the slightest idea that Isabel wasn't as happy as he. God, what blindness! He hadn't the remotest notion in those days that she really

hated that inconvenient little house, that she thought the fat Nanny was ruining the babies, that she was desperately lonely, pining for new people and new music and pictures and so on. If they hadn't gone to that studio party at Moira Morrison's--if Moira Morrison hadn't said as they were leaving, "I'm going to rescue your wife, selfish man. She's like an exquisite little Titania"--if Isabel hadn't gone with Moira to Paris--if--if...

The train stopped at another station. Bettingford. Good heavens! They'd be there in ten minutes. William stuffed that papers back into his pockets; the young man opposite had long since disappeared. Now the other two got out. The late afternoon sun shone on women in cotton frocks and little sunburnt, barefoot children. It blazed on a silky yellow flower with coarse leaves which sprawled over a bank of rock. The air ruffling through the window smelled of the sea. Had Isabel the same crowd with her this week-end, wondered William?

And he remembered the holidays they used to have, the four of them, with a little farm girl, Rose, to look after the babies. Isabel wore a jersey and her hair in a plait; she looked about fourteen. Lord! how his nose used to peel! And the amount they ate, and the amount they slept in that immense feather bed with their feet locked together... William couldn't help a grim smile as he thought of Isabel's horror if she knew the full extent of his sentimentality.

"Hillo, William!" She was at the station after all, standing just as he had imagined, apart from the others, and--William's heart leapt--she was alone.

"Hallo, Isabel!" William stared. He thought she looked so beautiful that he had to say something, "You look very cool."

"Do I?" said Isabel. "I don't feel very cool. Come along, your horrid old train is late. The taxi's outside." She put her hand lightly on his arm as they passed the ticket collector. "We've all come to meet you," she said. "But we've left Bobby Kane at the sweet shop, to be called for."

"Oh!" said William. It was all he could say for the moment.

There in the glare waited the taxi, with Bill Hunt and Dennis Green sprawling on one side, their hats tilted over their faces, while on the other, Moira Morrison, in a bonnet like a huge strawberry, jumped up and down.

"No ice! No ice! No ice!" she shouted gaily.

And Dennis chimed in from under his hat. "Only to be had from the fishmonger's."

And Bill Hunt, emerging, added, "With whole fish in it."

"Oh, what a bore!" wailed Isabel. And she explained to William how they had been chasing round the town for ice while she waited for him. "Simply everything is running down the steep cliffs into the sea, beginning with the butter."

"We shall have to anoint ourselves with butter," said Dennis. "May thy head, William, lack not ointment."

"Look here," said William, "how are we going to sit? I'd better get up by the driver."

"No, Bobby Kane's by the driver," said Isabel. "You're to sit between Moira and me." The taxi started. "What have you got in those mysterious parcels?"

"De-cap-it-ated heads!" said Bill Hunt, shuddering beneath his hat.

"Oh, fruit!" Isabel sounded very pleased. "Wise William! A melon and a pineapple. How too nice!"

"No, wait a bit," said William, smiling. But he really was anxious. "I brought them down for the kiddies."

"Oh, my dear!" Isabel laughed, and slipped her hand through his arm. "They'd be rolling in agonies if they were to eat them. No"--she patted his hand--"you must bring them something next time. I refuse to part with my pineapple."

"Cruel Isabel! Do let me smell it!" said Moira. She flung her arms across William appealingly. "Oh!" The strawberry bonnet fell forward: she sounded quite faint.

"A Lady in Love with a Pineapple," said Dennis, as the taxi drew up before a little shop with a striped blind. Out came Bobby Kane, his arms full of little packets.

"I do hope they'll be good. I've chosen them because of the colours. There are some round things which really look too divine. And just look at this nougat," he cried ecstatically, "just look at it! It's a perfect little ballet."

But at that moment the shopman appeared. "Oh, I forgot. They're none of them paid for," said Bobby, looking frightened. Isabel gave the shopman a note, and Bobby was radiant again. "Hallo, William! I'm sitting by the

driver.” And bareheaded, all in white, with his sleeves rolled up to the shoulders, he leapt into his place. “Avanti!” he cried...

After tea the others went off to bathe, while William stayed and made his peace with the kiddies. But Johnny and Paddy were asleep, the rose-red glow had paled, bats were flying, and still the bathers had not returned. As William wandered downstairs, the maid crossed the hall carrying a lamp. He followed her into the sitting-room. It was a long room, coloured yellow. On the wall opposite William some one had painted a young man, over life-size, with very wobbly legs, offering a wide-eyed daisy to a young woman who had one very short arm and one very long, thin one. Over the chairs and sofa there hung strips of black material, covered with big splashes like broken eggs, and everywhere one looked there seemed to be an ash-tray full of cigarette ends. William sat down in one of the arm-chairs. Nowadays, when one felt with one hand down the sides, it wasn't to come upon a sheep with three legs or a cow that had lost one horn, or a very fat dove out of the Noah's Ark. One fished up yet another little paper-covered book of smudged-looking poems... He thought of the wad of papers in his pocket, but he was too hungry and tired to read. The door was open; sounds came from the kitchen. The servants were talking as if they were alone in the house. Suddenly there came a loud screech of laughter and an equally loud “Sh!” They had remembered him. William got up and went through the French windows into the garden, and as he stood there in the shadow he heard the bathers coming up the sandy road; their voices rang through the quiet.

“I think its up to Moira to use her little arts and wiles.”

A tragic moan from Moira.

“We ought to have a gramophone for the weekends that played 'The Maid of the Mountains.'”

“Oh no! Oh no!” cried Isabel's voice. “That's not fair to William. Be nice to him, my children! He's only staying until to-morrow evening.”

“Leave him to me,” cried Bobby Kane. “I'm awfully good at looking after people.”

The gate swung open and shut. William moved on the terrace; they had seen him. “Hallo, William!” And Bobby Kane, flapping his towel, began to leap and pirouette on the parched lawn. “Pity you didn't come, William. The water was divine. And we all went to a little pub afterwards and had sloe gin.”

The others had reached the house. “I say, Isabel,” called Bobby, “would you like me to wear my Nijinsky dress to-night?”

“No,” said Isabel, “nobody's going to dress. We're all starving.

William's starving, too. Come along, mes amis, let's begin with sardines."

"I've found the sardines," said Moira, and she ran into the hall, holding a box high in the air.

"A Lady with a Box of Sardines," said Dennis gravely.

"Well, William, and how's London?" asked Bill Hunt, drawing the cork out of a bottle of whisky.

"Oh, London's not much changed," answered William.

"Good old London," said Bobby, very hearty, spearing a sardine.

But a moment later William was forgotten. Moira Morrison began wondering what colour one's legs really were under water.

"Mine are the palest, palest mushroom colour."

Bill and Dennis ate enormously. And Isabel filled glasses, and changed plates, and found matches, smiling blissfully. At one moment, she said, "I do wish, Bill, you'd paint it."

"Paint what?" said Bill loudly, stuffing his mouth with bread.

"Us," said Isabel, "round the table. It would be so fascinating in twenty years' time."

Bill screwed up his eyes and chewed. "Light's wrong," he said rudely, "far too much yellow"; and went on eating. And that seemed to charm Isabel, too.

But after supper they were all so tired they could do nothing but yawn until it was late enough to go to bed...

It was not until William was waiting for his taxi the next afternoon that he found himself alone with Isabel. When he brought his suit-case down into the hall, Isabel left the others and went over to him. She stooped down and picked up the suit-case. "What a weight!" she said, and she gave a little awkward laugh. "Let me carry it! To the gate."

"No, why should you?" said William. "Of course, not. Give it to me."

"Oh, please, do let me," said Isabel. "I want to, really." They walked together silently. William felt there was nothing to say now.

"There," said Isabel triumphantly, setting the suit-case down, and she looked anxiously along the sandy road. "I hardly seem to have seen you

this time," she said breathlessly. "It's so short, isn't it? I feel you've only just come. Next time--" The taxi came into sight. "I hope they look after you properly in London. I'm so sorry the babies have been out all day, but Miss Neil had arranged it. They'll hate missing you. Poor William, going back to London." The taxi turned. "Good-bye!" She gave him a little hurried kiss; she was gone.

Fields, trees, hedges streamed by. They shook through the empty, blind-looking little town, ground up the steep pull to the station.

The train was in. William made straight for a first-class smoker, flung back into the corner, but this time he let the papers alone. He folded his arms against the dull, persistent gnawing, and began in his mind to write a letter to Isabel.

The post was late as usual. They sat outside the house in long chairs under coloured parasols. Only Bobby Kane lay on the turf at Isabel's feet. It was dull, stifling; the day drooped like a flag.

"Do you think there will be Mondays in Heaven?" asked Bobby childishly.

And Dennis murmured, "Heaven will be one long Monday."

But Isabel couldn't help wondering what had happened to the salmon they had for supper last night. She had meant to have fish mayonnaise for lunch and now...

Moirra was asleep. Sleeping was her latest discovery. "It's so wonderful. One simply shuts one's eyes, that's all. It's so delicious."

When the old ruddy postman came beating along the sandy road on his tricycle one felt the handle-bars ought to have been oars.

Bill Hunt put down his book. "Letters," he said complacently, and they all waited. But, heartless postman--O malignant world! There was only one, a fat one for Isabel. Not even a paper.

"And mine's only from William," said Isabel mournfully.

"From William--already?"

"He's sending you back your marriage lines as a gentle reminder."

"Does everybody have marriage lines? I thought they were only for servants."

"Pages and pages! Look at her! A Lady reading a Letter," said Dennis.

“My darling, precious Isabel.” Pages and pages there were. As Isabel read on her feeling of astonishment changed to a stifled feeling. What on earth had induced William... ? How extraordinary it was... What could have made him... ? She felt confused, more and more excited, even frightened. It was just like William. Was it? It was absurd, of course, it must be absurd, ridiculous. “Ha, ha, ha! Oh dear!” What was she to do? Isabel flung back in her chair and laughed till she couldn't stop laughing.

“Do, do tell us,” said the others. “You must tell us.”

“I'm longing to,” gurgled Isabel. She sat up, gathered the letter, and waved it at them. “Gather round,” she said. “Listen, it's too marvellous. A love-letter!”

“A love-letter! But how divine!” “Darling, precious Isabel.” But she had hardly begun before their laughter interrupted her.

“Go on, Isabel, it's perfect.”

“It's the most marvellous find.”

“Oh, do go on, Isabel!”

“God forbid, my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness.”

“Oh! oh! oh!”

“Sh! sh! sh!”

And Isabel went on. When she reached the end they were hysterical: Bobby rolled on the turf and almost sobbed.

“You must let me have it just as it is, entire, for my new book,” said Dennis firmly. “I shall give it a whole chapter.”

“Oh, Isabel,” moaned Moira, “that wonderful bit about holding you in his arms!”

“I always thought those letters in divorce cases were made up. But they pale before this.”

“Let me hold it. Let me read it, mine own self,” said Bobby Kane.

But, to their surprise, Isabel crushed the letter in her hand. She was laughing no longer. She glanced quickly at them all; she looked exhausted. “No, not just now. Not just now,” she stammered.

And before they could recover she had run into the house, through the hall, up the stairs into her bedroom. Down she sat on the side of the bed. "How vile, odious, abominable, vulgar," muttered Isabel. She pressed her eyes with her knuckles and rocked to and fro. And again she saw them, but not four, more like forty, laughing, sneering, jeering, stretching out their hands while she read them William's letter. Oh, what a loathsome thing to have done. How could she have done it! "God forbid, my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness." William! Isabel pressed her face into the pillow. But she felt that even the grave bedroom knew her for what she was, shallow, tinkling, vain...

Presently from the garden below there came voices.

"Isabel, we're all going for a bathe. Do come!"

"Come, thou wife of William!"

"Call her once before you go, call once yet!"

Isabel sat up. Now was the moment, now she must decide. Would she go with them, or stay here and write to William. Which, which should it be? "I must make up my mind." Oh, but how could there be any question? Of course she would stay here and write.

"Titania!" piped Moira.

"Isa-bel?"

No, it was too difficult. "I'll--I'll go with them, and write to William later. Some other time. Later. Not now. But I shall certainly write," thought Isabel hurriedly.

And, laughing, in the new way, she ran down the stairs.

THE GREATER SEA

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Madman*, by Khalil Gibran

My soul and I went to the great sea to bathe. And when we reached the shore, we went about looking for a hidden and lonely place.

But as we walked, we saw a man sitting on a grey rock taking pinches of salt from a bag and throwing them into the sea.

"This is the pessimist," said my soul, "Let us leave this place."

We cannot bathe here."

We walked on until we reached an inlet. There we saw, standing on a white rock, a man holding a bejeweled box, from which he took sugar and threw it into the sea.

"And this is the optimist," said my soul, "And he too must not see our naked bodies."

Further on we walked. And on a beach we saw a man picking up dead fish and tenderly putting them back into the water.

"And we cannot bathe before him," said my soul. "He is the humane philanthropist."

And we passed on.

Then we came where we saw a man tracing his shadow on the sand. Great waves came and erased it. But he went on tracing it again and again.

"He is the mystic," said my soul, "Let us leave him."

And we walked on, till in a quiet cover we saw a man scooping up the foam and putting it into an alabaster bowl.

"He is the idealist," said my soul, "Surely he must not see our nudity."

And on we walked. Suddenly we heard a voice crying, "This is the sea. This is the deep sea. This is the vast and mighty sea." And when we reached the voice it was a man whose back was turned to the sea, and at his ear he held a shell, listening to its murmur.

And my soul said, "Let us pass on. He is the realist, who turns his back on the whole he cannot grasp, and busies himself with a fragment."

So we passed on. And in a weedy place among the rocks was a man with his head buried in the sand. And I said to my soul, "We can bath here, for he cannot see us."

"Nay," said my soul, "For he is the most deadly of them all. He is the puritan."

Then a great sadness came over the face of my soul, and into her voice.

"Let us go hence," she said, "For there is no lonely, hidden place

where we can bathe. I would not have this wind lift my golden hair,
or bare my white bosom in this air, or let the light disclose my
sacred nakedness."

Then we left that sea to seek the Greater Sea.

THE ISLAND OF THE FAY

Project Gutenberg's *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. 2*, by Edgar Allan Poe

Nullus enim locus sine genio est.--_Servius_.

"LA MUSIQUE," says Marmontel, in those "Contes Moraux" (*1) which in all our translations, we have insisted upon calling "Moral Tales," as if in mockery of their spirit--"la musique est le seul des talents qui jouissent de lui-meme; tous les autres veulent des temoins." He here confounds the pleasure derivable from sweet sounds with the capacity for creating them. No more than any other talent, is that for music susceptible of complete enjoyment, where there is no second party to appreciate its exercise. And it is only in common with other talents that it produces effects which may be fully enjoyed in solitude. The idea which the raconteur has either failed to entertain clearly, or has sacrificed in its expression to his national love of point, is, doubtless, the very tenable one that the higher order of music is the most thoroughly estimated when we are exclusively alone. The proposition, in this form, will be admitted at once by those who love the lyre for its own sake, and for its spiritual uses. But there is one pleasure still within the reach of fallen mortality and perhaps only one--which owes even more than does music to the accessory sentiment of seclusion. I mean the happiness experienced in the contemplation of natural scenery. In truth, the man who would behold aright the glory of God upon earth must in solitude behold that glory. To me, at least, the presence--not of human life only, but of life in any other form than that of the green things which grow upon the soil and are voiceless--is a stain upon the landscape--is at war with the genius of the scene. I love, indeed, to regard the dark valleys, and the gray rocks, and the waters that silently smile, and the forests that sigh in uneasy slumbers, and the proud watchful mountains that look down upon all,--I love to regard these as themselves but the colossal members of one vast animate and sentient whole--a whole whose form (that of the sphere) is the most perfect and most inclusive of all; whose path is among associate planets; whose meek handmaiden is the moon, whose mediate sovereign is the sun; whose life is eternity, whose thought is that of a God; whose enjoyment is knowledge; whose destinies are lost in immensity, whose cognizance of ourselves is akin with our own cognizance

of the animalculae which infest the brain--a being which we, in consequence, regard as purely inanimate and material much in the same manner as these animalculae must thus regard us.

Our telescopes and our mathematical investigations assure us on every hand--notwithstanding the cant of the more ignorant of the priesthood--that space, and therefore that bulk, is an important consideration in the eyes of the Almighty. The cycles in which the stars move are those best adapted for the evolution, without collision, of the greatest possible number of bodies. The forms of those bodies are accurately such as, within a given surface, to include the greatest possible amount of matter;--while the surfaces themselves are so disposed as to accommodate a denser population than could be accommodated on the same surfaces otherwise arranged. Nor is it any argument against bulk being an object with God, that space itself is infinite; for there may be an infinity of matter to fill it. And since we see clearly that the endowment of matter with vitality is a principle--indeed, as far as our judgments extend, the leading principle in the operations of Deity,--it is scarcely logical to imagine it confined to the regions of the minute, where we daily trace it, and not extending to those of the august. As we find cycle within cycle without end,--yet all revolving around one far-distant centre which is the God-head, may we not analogically suppose in the same manner, life within life, the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine? In short, we are madly erring, through self-esteem, in believing man, in either his temporal or future destinies, to be of more moment in the universe than that vast "clod of the valley" which he tills and contemns, and to which he denies a soul for no more profound reason than that he does not behold it in operation. (*2)

These fancies, and such as these, have always given to my meditations among the mountains and the forests, by the rivers and the ocean, a tinge of what the everyday world would not fail to term fantastic. My wanderings amid such scenes have been many, and far-searching, and often solitary; and the interest with which I have strayed through many a dim, deep valley, or gazed into the reflected Heaven of many a bright lake, has been an interest greatly deepened by the thought that I have strayed and gazed alone. What flippant Frenchman was it who said in allusion to the well-known work of Zimmerman, that, "*la solitude est une belle chose; mais il faut quelqu'un pour vous dire que la solitude est une belle chose?*" The epigram cannot be gainsayed; but the necessity is a thing that does not exist.

It was during one of my lonely journeyings, amid a far distant region of mountain locked within mountain, and sad rivers and melancholy tarn writhing or sleeping within all--that I chanced upon a certain rivulet and island. I came upon them suddenly in the leafy June, and threw myself upon the turf, beneath the branches of an unknown odorous shrub, that I might doze as I contemplated the scene. I felt that thus only

should I look upon it--such was the character of phantasm which it wore.

On all sides--save to the west, where the sun was about sinking--arose the verdant walls of the forest. The little river which turned sharply in its course, and was thus immediately lost to sight, seemed to have no exit from its prison, but to be absorbed by the deep green foliage of the trees to the east--while in the opposite quarter (so it appeared to me as I lay at length and glanced upward) there poured down noiselessly and continuously into the valley, a rich golden and crimson waterfall from the sunset fountains of the sky.

About midway in the short vista which my dreamy vision took in, one small circular island, profusely verdured, reposed upon the bosom of the stream.

So blended bank and shadow there

That each seemed pendulous in air--so mirror-like was the glassy water, that it was scarcely possible to say at what point upon the slope of the emerald turf its crystal dominion began.

My position enabled me to include in a single view both the eastern and western extremities of the islet; and I observed a singularly-marked difference in their aspects. The latter was all one radiant harem of garden beauties. It glowed and blushed beneath the eyes of the slant sunlight, and fairly laughed with flowers. The grass was short, springy, sweet-scented, and Asphodel-interpersed. The trees were lithe, mirthful, erect--bright, slender, and graceful,--of eastern figure and foliage, with bark smooth, glossy, and parti-colored. There seemed a deep sense of life and joy about all; and although no airs blew from out the heavens, yet every thing had motion through the gentle sweepings to and fro of innumerable butterflies, that might have been mistaken for tulips with wings. (*4)

The other or eastern end of the isle was whelmed in the blackest shade. A sombre, yet beautiful and peaceful gloom here pervaded all things. The trees were dark in color, and mournful in form and attitude, wreathing themselves into sad, solemn, and spectral shapes that conveyed ideas of mortal sorrow and untimely death. The grass wore the deep tint of the cypress, and the heads of its blades hung droopingly, and hither and thither among it were many small unsightly hillocks, low and narrow, and not very long, that had the aspect of graves, but were not; although over and all about them the rue and the rosemary clambered. The shade of the trees fell heavily upon the water, and seemed to bury itself therein, impregnating the depths of the element with darkness. I fancied that each shadow, as the sun descended lower and lower, separated itself sullenly from the trunk that gave it birth, and thus became absorbed by the stream; while other shadows issued momentarily from the trees, taking the place of their predecessors thus entombed.

This idea, having once seized upon my fancy, greatly excited it, and I lost myself forthwith in revery. "If ever island were enchanted," said I to myself, "this is it. This is the haunt of the few gentle Fays who remain from the wreck of the race. Are these green tombs theirs?--or do they yield up their sweet lives as mankind yield up their own? In dying, do they not rather waste away mournfully, rendering unto God, little by little, their existence, as these trees render up shadow after shadow, exhausting their substance unto dissolution? What the wasting tree is to the water that imbibes its shade, growing thus blacker by what it preys upon, may not the life of the Fay be to the death which engulfs it?"

As I thus mused, with half-shut eyes, while the sun sank rapidly to rest, and eddying currents careered round and round the island, bearing upon their bosom large, dazzling, white flakes of the bark of the sycamore--flakes which, in their multiform positions upon the water, a quick imagination might have converted into any thing it pleased, while I thus mused, it appeared to me that the form of one of those very Fays about whom I had been pondering made its way slowly into the darkness from out the light at the western end of the island. She stood erect in a singularly fragile canoe, and urged it with the mere phantom of an oar. While within the influence of the lingering sunbeams, her attitude seemed indicative of joy--but sorrow deformed it as she passed within the shade. Slowly she glided along, and at length rounded the islet and re-entered the region of light. "The revolution which has just been made by the Fay," continued I, musingly, "is the cycle of the brief year of her life. She has floated through her winter and through her summer. She is a year nearer unto Death; for I did not fail to see that, as she came into the shade, her shadow fell from her, and was swallowed up in the dark water, making its blackness more black."

And again the boat appeared and the Fay, but about the attitude of the latter there was more of care and uncertainty and less of elastic joy. She floated again from out the light and into the gloom (which deepened momentarily) and again her shadow fell from her into the ebony water, and became absorbed into its blackness. And again and again she made the circuit of the island, (while the sun rushed down to his slumbers), and at each issuing into the light there was more sorrow about her person, while it grew feebler and far fainter and more indistinct, and at each passage into the gloom there fell from her a darker shade, which became whelmed in a shadow more black. But at length when the sun had utterly departed, the Fay, now the mere ghost of her former self, went disconsolately with her boat into the region of the ebony flood, and that she issued thence at all I cannot say, for darkness fell over all things and I beheld her magical figure no more.

THE EASTERN WINDOW.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Stoneground Ghost Tales*, by E. G. Swain

It may well be that Vermuyden and the Dutchmen who drained the fens did good, and that it was interred with their bones. It is quite certain that they did evil and that it lives after them. The rivers, which these men robbed of their water, have at length silted up, and the drainage of one tract of country is proving to have been achieved by the undraining of another.

Places like Stoneground, which lie on the banks of these defrauded rivers, are now become helpless victims of Dutch engineering. The water which has lost its natural outlet, invades their lands. The thrifty cottager who once had the river at the bottom of his garden, has his garden more often in these days, at the bottom of the river, and a summer flood not infrequently destroys the whole produce of his ground.

Such a flood, during an early year in the 20th century, had been unusually disastrous to Stoneground, and Mr. Batchel, who, as a gardener, was well able to estimate the losses of his poorer neighbours, was taking some steps towards repairing them.

Money, however, is never at rest in Stoneground, and it turned out upon this occasion that the funds placed at his command were wholly inadequate to the charitable purpose assigned to them. It seemed as if those who had lost a rood of potatoes could be compensated for no more than a yard.

It was at this time, when he was oppressed in mind by the failure of his charitable enterprise, that Mr. Batchel met with the happy adventure in which the Eastern window of the Church played so singular a part.

The narrative should be prefaced by a brief description of the window in question. It is a large painted window, of a somewhat unfortunate period of execution. The drawing and colouring leave everything to be desired. The scheme of the window, however, is based upon a wholesome tradition. The five large lights in the lower part are assigned to five scenes in the life of Our Lord, and the second of these, counting from the North, contains a bold erect figure of St. John Baptist, to whom the Church is dedicated. It is this figure alone, of all those contained in the window, that is concerned in what we have to relate.

It has already been mentioned that Mr. Batchel had some knowledge of music. He took an interest in the choir, from whose practices he was seldom absent; and was quite competent, in the occasional absence of the choirmaster, to act as his deputy. It is customary at Stoneground for the choirmaster, in order to save the sexton a journey, to

extinguish the lights after a choir-practice and to lock up the Church. These duties, accordingly, were performed by Mr. Batchel when the need arose.

It will be of use to the reader to have the procedure in detail. The large gas-meter stood in an aisle of the Church, and it was Mr. Batchel's practice to go round and extinguish all the lights save one, before turning off the gas at the meter. The one remaining light, which was reached by standing upon a choir seat, was always that nearest the door of the chancel, and experience proved that there was ample time to walk from the meter to that light before it died out. It was therefore an easy matter to turn off the last light, to find the door without its aid, and thence to pass out, and close the Church for the night.

Upon the evening of which we have to speak, the choir had hurried out as usual, as soon as the word had been given. Mr. Batchel had remained to gather together some of the books they had left in disorder, and then turned out the lights in the manner already described. But as soon as he had extinguished the last light, his eye fell, as he descended carefully from the seat, upon the figure of the Baptist. There was just enough light outside to make the figures visible in the Eastern Window, and Mr. Batchel saw the figure of St. John raise the right arm to its full extent, and point northward, turning its head, at the same time, so as to look him full in the face. These movements were three times repeated, and, after that, the figure came to rest in its normal and familiar position.

The reader will not suppose, any more than Mr. Batchel supposed, that a figure painted upon glass had suddenly been endowed with the power of movement. But that there had been the appearance of movement admitted of no doubt, and Mr. Batchel was not so incurious as to let the matter pass without some attempt at investigation. It must be remembered, too, that an experience in the old library, which has been previously recorded, had pre-disposed him to give attention to signs which another man might have wished to explain away. He was not willing, therefore, to leave this matter where it stood. He was quite prepared to think that his eye had been deceived, but was none the less determined to find out what had deceived it. One thing he had no difficulty in deciding. If the movement had not been actually within the Baptist's figure, it had been immediately behind it. Without delay, therefore, he passed out of the church and locked the door after him, with the intention of examining the other side of the window.

Every inhabitant of Stoneground knows, and laments, the ruin of the old Manor House. Its loss by fire some fifteen years ago was a calamity from which the parish has never recovered. The estate was acquired, soon after the destruction of the house, by speculators who have been unable to turn it to any account, and it has for a decade or longer been "let alone," except by the forces of Nature and the wantonness of

trespassers. The charred remains of the house still project above the surrounding heaps of fallen masonry, which have long been overgrown by such vegetation as thrives on neglected ground; and what was once a stately house, with its garden and park in fine order, has given place to a scene of desolation and ruin.

Stoneground Church was built, some 600 years ago, within the enclosure of the Manor House, or, as it was anciently termed, the Burystead, and an excellent stratum of gravel such as no builder would wisely disregard, brought the house and Church unusually near together. In more primitive days, the nearness probably caused no inconvenience; but when change and progress affected the popular idea of respectful distance, the Churchyard came to be separated by a substantial stone wall, of sufficient height to secure the privacy of the house.

The change was made with necessary regard to economy of space. The Eastern wall of the Church already projected far into the garden of the Manor, and lay but fifty yards from the south front of the house. On that side of the Churchyard, therefore, the new wall was set back. Running from the north to the nearest corner of the Church, it was there built up to the Church itself, and then continued from the southern corner, leaving the Eastern wall and window within the garden of the Squire. It was his ivy that clung to the wall of the Church, and his trees that shaded the window from the morning sun.

Whilst we have been recalling these facts, Mr. Batchel has made his way out of the Church and through the Churchyard, and has arrived at a small door in the boundary wall, close to the S.E. corner of the chancel. It was a door which some Squire of the previous century had made, to give convenient access to the Church for himself and his household. It has no present use, and Mr. Batchel had some difficulty in getting it open. It was not long, however, before he stood on the inner side, and was examining the second light of the window. There was a tolerably bright moon, and the dark surface of the glass could be distinctly seen, as well as the wirework placed there for its protection.

A tall birch, one of the trees of the old Churchyard, had thrust its lower boughs across the window, and their silvery bark shone in the moonlight. The boughs were bare of leaves, and only very slightly interrupted Mr. Batchel's view of the Baptist's figure, the leaden outline of which was clearly traceable. There was nothing, however, to account for the movement which Mr. Batchel was curious to investigate.

He was about to turn homewards in some disappointment, when a cloud obscured the moon again, and reduced the light to what it had been before he left the Church. Mr. Batchel watched the darkening of the window and the objects near it, and as the figure of the Baptist disappeared from view there came into sight a creamy vaporous figure of

another person lightly poised upon the bough of the tree, and almost coincident in position with the picture of the Saint.

It could hardly be described as the figure of a person. It had more the appearance of half a person, and fancifully suggested to Mr. Batchel, who was fond of whist, one of the diagonally bisected knaves in a pack of cards, as he appears when another card conceals a triangular half of the bust.

There was no question, now, of going home. Mr. Batchel's eyes were riveted upon the apparition. It disappeared again for a moment, when an interval between two clouds restored the light of the moon; but no sooner had the second cloud replaced the first than the figure again became distinct. And upon this, its single arm was raised three times, pointing northwards towards the ruined house, just as the figure of the Baptist had seemed to point when Mr. Batchel had seen it from within the Church.

It was natural that upon receipt of this sign Mr. Batchel should step nearer to the tree, from which he was still at some little distance, and as he moved, the figure floated obliquely downwards and came to rest in a direct line between him and the ruins of the house. It rested, not upon the ground, but in just such a position as it would have occupied if the lower parts had been there, and in this position it seemed to await Mr. Batchel's advance. He made such haste to approach it as was possible upon ground encumbered with ivy and brambles, and the figure responded to every advance of his by moving further in the direction of the ruin.

As the ground improved, the progress became more rapid. Soon they were both upon an open stretch of grass, which in better days had been a lawn, and still the figure retreated towards the building, with Mr. Batchel in respectful pursuit. He saw it, at last, poised upon the summit of a heap of masonry, and it disappeared, at his near approach, into a crevice between two large stones.

The timely re-appearance of the moon just enabled Mr. Batchel to perceive this crevice, and he took advantage of the interval of light to mark the place. Taking up a large twig that lay at his feet, he inserted it between the stones. He made a slit in the free end and drew into it one of some papers that he had carried out of the Church. After such a precaution it could hardly be possible to lose the place--for, of course, Mr. Batchel intended to return in daylight and continue his investigation. For the present, it seemed to be at an end. The light was soon obscured again, but there was no re-appearance of the singular figure he had followed, so after remaining about the spot for a few minutes, Mr. Batchel went home to his customary occupation.

He was not a man to let these occupations be disturbed even by a

somewhat exciting adventure, nor was he one of those who regard an unusual experience only as a sign of nervous disorder. Mr. Batchel had far too broad a mind to discredit his sensations because they were not like those of other people. Even had his adventure of the evening been shared by some companion who saw less than he did, Mr. Batchel would only have inferred that his own part in the matter was being regarded as more important.

Next morning, therefore, he lost no time in returning to the scene of his adventure. He found his mark undisturbed, and was able to examine the crevice into which the apparition had seemed to enter. It was a crevice formed by the curved surfaces of two large stones which lay together on the top of a small heap of fallen rubbish, and these two stones Mr. Batchel proceeded to remove. His strength was just sufficient for the purpose. He laid the stones upon the ground on either side of the little mound, and then proceeded to remove, with his hands, the rubbish upon which they had rested, and amongst the rubbish he found, tarnished and blackened, two silver coins.

It was not a discovery which seemed to afford any explanation of what had occurred the night before, but Mr. Batchel could not but suppose that there had been an attempt to direct his attention to the coins, and he carried them away with a view of submitting them to a careful examination. Taking them up to his bedroom he poured a little water into a hand basin, and soon succeeded, with the aid of soap and a nail brush, in making them tolerably clean. Ten minutes later, after adding ammonia to the water, he had made them bright, and after carefully drying them, was able to make his examination. They were two crowns of the time of Queen Anne, minted, as a small letter E indicated, at Edinburgh, and stamped with the roses and plumes which testified to the English and Welsh silver in their composition. The coins bore no date, but Mr. Batchel had no hesitation in assigning them to the year 1708 or thereabouts. They were handsome coins, and in themselves a find of considerable interest, but there was nothing to show why he had been directed to their place of concealment. It was an enigma, and he could not solve it. He had other work to do, so he laid the two crowns upon his dressing table, and proceeded to do it.

Mr. Batchel thought little more of the coins until bedtime, when he took them from the table and bestowed upon them another admiring examination by the light of his candle. But the examination told him nothing new: he laid them down again, and, before very long, had lain his own head upon the pillow.

It was Mr. Batchel's custom to read himself to sleep. At this time he happened to be re-reading the Waverley novels, and "Woodstock" lay upon the reading-stand which was always placed at his bedside. As he read of the cleverly devised apparition at Woodstock, he naturally asked himself whether he might not have been the victim of some

similar trickery, but was not long in coming to the conclusion that his experience admitted of no such explanation. He soon dismissed the matter from his mind and went on with his book.

On this occasion, however, he was tired of reading before he was ready for sleep; it was long in coming, and then did not come to stay. His rest, in fact, was greatly disturbed. Again and again, perhaps every hour or so, he was awakened by an uneasy consciousness of some other presence in the room.

Upon one of his later awakenings, he was distinctly sensible of a sound, or what he described to himself as the "ghost" of a sound. He compared it to the whining of a dog that had lost its voice. It was not a very intelligible comparison, but still it seemed to describe his sensation. The sound, if we may so call it caused him first to sit up in bed and look well about him, and then, when nothing had come of that, to light his candle. It was not to be expected that anything should come of that, but it had seemed a comfortable thing to do, and Mr. Batchel left the candle alight and read his book for half an hour or so, before blowing it out.

After this, there was no further interruption, but Mr. Batchel distinctly felt, when it was time to leave his bed, that he had had a bad night. The coins, almost to his surprise, lay undisturbed. He went to ascertain this as soon as he was on his feet. He would almost have welcomed their removal, or at any rate, some change which might have helped him towards a theory of his adventure. There was, however, nothing. If he had, in fact, been visited during the night, the coins would seem to have had nothing to do with the matter.

Mr. Batchel left the two crowns lying on his table on this next day, and went about his ordinary duties. They were such duties as afforded full occupation for his mind, and he gave no more than a passing thought to the coins, until he was again retiring to rest. He had certainly intended to return to the heap of rubbish from which he had taken them, but had not found leisure to do so. He did not handle the coins again. As he undressed, he made some attempt to estimate their value, but without having arrived at any conclusion, went on to think of other things, and in a little while had lain down to rest again, hoping for a better night.

His hopes were disappointed. Within an hour of falling asleep he found himself awakened again by the voiceless whining he so well remembered. This sound, as for convenience we will call it, was now persistent and continuous. Mr. Batchel gave up even trying to sleep, and as he grew more restless and uneasy, decided to get up and dress.

It was the entire cessation of the sound at this juncture which led him to a suspicion. His rising was evidently giving satisfaction. From

that it was easy to infer that something had been desired of him, both on the present and the preceding night. Mr. Batchel was not one to hold himself aloof in such a case. If help was wanted, even in such unnatural circumstances, he was ready to offer it. He determined, accordingly, to return to the Manor House, and when he had finished dressing, descended the stairs, put on a warm overcoat and went out, closing his hall door behind him, without having heard any more of the sound, either whilst dressing, or whilst leaving the house.

Once out of doors, the suspicion he had formed was strengthened into a conviction. There was no manner of doubt that he had been fetched from his bed; for about 30 yards in front of him he saw the strange creamy half-figure making straight for the ruins. He followed it as well as he could; as before, he was impeded by the ivy and weeds, and the figure awaited him; as before, it made straight for the heap of masonry and disappeared as soon as Mr. Batchel was at liberty to follow.

There were no dungeons, or subterranean premises beneath the Manor House. It had never been more than a house of residence, and the building had been purely domestic in character. Mr. Batchel was convinced that his adventure would prove unromantic, and felt some impatience at losing again, what he had begun to call his triangular friend. If this friend wanted anything, it was not easy to say why he had so tamely disappeared. There seemed nothing to be done but to wait until he came out again.

Mr. Batchel had a pipe in his pocket, and he seated himself upon the base of a sun-dial within full view of the spot. He filled and smoked his pipe, sitting in momentary expectation of some further sign, but nothing appeared. He heard the hedgehogs moving about him in the undergrowth, and now and then the sound of a restless bird overhead, otherwise all was still. He smoked a second pipe without any further discovery, and that finished, he knocked out the ashes against his boot, walked to the mound, near to which his labelled stick was lying, thrust the stick into the place where the figure had disappeared, and went back to bed, where he was rewarded with five hours of sound sleep.

Mr. Batchel had made up his mind that the next day ought to be a day of disclosure. He was early at the Manor House, this time provided with the gardener's pick, and a spade. He thrust the pick into the place from which he had removed his mark, and loosened the rubbish thoroughly. With his hands, and with his spade, he was not long in reducing the size of the heap by about one-half, and there he found more coins.

There were three more crowns, two half-crowns, and a dozen or so of smaller coins. All these Mr. Batchel wrapped carefully in his handkerchief, and after a few minutes rest went on with his task. As it proved, the task was nearly over. Some strips of oak about nine

inches long, were next uncovered, and then, what Mr. Batchel had begun to expect, the lid of a box, with the hinges still attached. It lay, face downwards, upon a flat stone. It proved, when he had taken it up, to be almost unsoiled, and above a long and wide slit in the lid was the gilded legend, "for ye poore" in the graceful lettering and the redundant spelling of two centuries ago.

The meaning of all this Mr. Batchel was not long in interpreting. That the box and its contents had fallen and been broken amongst the masonry, was evident enough. It was as evident that it had been concealed in one of the walls brought down by the fire, and Mr. Batchel had no doubt at all that he had been in the company of a thief, who had once stolen the poor-box from the Church. His task seemed to be at an end, a further rummage revealed nothing new. Mr. Batchel carefully collected the fragments of the box, and left the place.

His next act cannot be defended. He must have been aware that these coins were "treasure trove," and therefore the property of the Crown. In spite of this, he determined to convert them into current coin, as he well knew how, and to apply the proceeds to the Inundation Fund about which he was so anxious. Treating them as his own property, he cleaned them all, as he had cleaned the two crowns, sent them to an antiquarian friend in London to sell for him, and awaited the result. The lid of the poor box he still preserves as a relic of the adventure.

His antiquarian friend did not keep him long waiting. The coins had been eagerly bought, and the price surpassed any expectation that Mr. Batchel had allowed himself to entertain. He had sent the package to London on Saturday morning. Upon the following Tuesday, the last post in the evening brought a cheque for twenty guineas. The brief subscription list of the Inundation Fund lay upon his desk, and he at once entered the amount he had so strangely come by, but could not immediately decide upon its description. Leaving the line blank, therefore, he merely wrote down £21 in the cash column, to be assigned to its source in some suitable form of words when he should have found time to frame them.

In this state he left the subscription list upon his desk, when he retired for the night. It occurred to him as he was undressing, that the twenty guineas might suitably be described as a "restitution," and so he determined to enter it upon the line he had left vacant. As he reconsidered the matter in the morning, he saw no reason to alter his decision, and he went straight from his bedroom to his desk to make the entry and have done with it.

There was an incident in the adventure, however, upon which Mr. Batchel had not reckoned. As he approached the list, he saw, to his amazement, that the line had been filled in. In a crabbed, elongated hand was written, "At last, St. Matt. v. 26."

What may seem more strange is that the handwriting was familiar to Mr. Batchel, he could not at first say why. His memory, however, in such matters, was singularly good, and before breakfast was over he felt sure of having identified the writer.

His confidence was not misplaced. He went to the parish chest, whose contents he had thoroughly examined in past intervals of leisure, and took out the roll of parish constable's accounts. In a few minutes he discovered the handwriting of which he was in search. It was unmistakably that of Salathiel Thrapston, constable from 1705-1710, who met his death in the latter year, whilst in the execution of his duty. The reader will scarcely need to be reminded of the text of the Gospel at the place of reference--

"Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

A SIMPLE STORY

by Elizabeth Inchbald

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I.--The Priest's Ward

Dorriforth, bred at St. Omer's in all the scholastic rigour of that college, was, by education and the solemn vows of his order, a Roman Catholic priest. He was about thirty, and refusing to shelter himself from the temptations of the layman by the walls of a cloister, but finding that shelter in his own prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, had lived in London near five years, when a gentleman with whom he had contracted a most sincere friendship died, and left him the sole guardian of his daughter, who was then eighteen.

It is in this place proper to remark that Mr. Milner was a member of the Church of Rome, but his daughter had been educated in her dead mother's religion at a boarding-school for Protestants, whence she had returned with her little heart employed in all the endless pursuits of personal accomplishments, and her mind left without one ornament, except such as nature gave.

She had been visiting at Bath when her father died. Therefore, Mr. Dorriforth, together with Miss Woodley, the middle-aged niece of the widow lady, Mrs. Horton, who kept his house, journeyed midway to meet her. But when the carriage stopped at the inn-gate, and her name was

announced, he turned pale--something like a foreboding of disaster trembled at his heart--and Miss Woodley was obliged to be the first to welcome his lovely charge--lovely beyond description.

But the natural vivacity, the gaiety which report had given to Miss Milner, were softened by her recent sorrow to a meek sadness. The instant Dorriforth was introduced to her as her "guardian, and her deceased father's most beloved friend," she burst into tears, and kneeling before him, promised ever to obey him as a father. She told him artlessly she had expected him to be elderly and plain. He was somewhat embarrassed, but replied that she should find him a plain man in all his actions; and in the conversation which followed, in which she had somewhat lightly referred to his faith, begged that religion should not be named between them, for, as he had resolved never to persecute her, in pity she should be grateful, and not persecute him.

Among the many visitors who attended her levées during the following weeks was Lord Frederick Lawnly, whose intimacy with her Dorriforth beheld with alternate pain and pleasure. He wished to see his charge married, yet he trembled for her happiness under the care of a young nobleman immersed in all the vices of the town. His uneasiness made him desire her to forbid Lord Frederick's visits, who, alarmed, confounded, and provoked, remonstrated passionately.

"By heaven, I believe Mr. Dorriforth loves you himself, and it is jealousy which makes him treat me in this way!"

"For shame, my lord!" cried Miss Woodley, trembling with horror at the sacrilegious idea.

"Nay, shame to him if he is not in love!" answered his lordship. "For who but a savage could behold beauty like yours without owning its power? And surely when your guardian looks at you, his wishes-----"

"Are never less pure," Miss Milner replied eagerly, "than those which dwell in the bosom of my celestial guardian."

At this moment Dorriforth entered the room.

"What's the matter?" cried he, looking with concern on his discomposure.

"A compliment paid by herself to you, sir," replied Lord Frederick, "has affected your ward in the manner you have seen." And then he changed the subject with an air of ridicule, while Miss Milner threw open the sash, and leaned her head from the window to conceal the embarrassment his implication had caused her.

Although Dorriforth was a good man, there was an obstinacy in his nature which sometimes degenerated into implacable stubbornness. The child of a

sister once beloved, who married a young officer against her brother's consent, was left an orphan, destitute of all support but from his uncle's generosity; but, although Dorriforth maintained him, he would never see him. Miss Milner brought the boy to town once to present him to his uncle, but no sooner did he hear Harry Rushbrook's name than he set him off his knee, and, calling for his hat, walked instantly from the house, although dinner had just been served.

About this time Miss Milner had the humiliation of having Miss Fenton held up to her as a pattern for her to follow; but, instead of being inspired to emulation, she was provoked to envy. Young, beautiful, elegant, Miss Fenton was betrothed to Lord Elmwood, Mr. Dorriforth's cousin; and Dorriforth, whose heart was not formed--at least, not educated--for love, beheld in her the most perfect model for her sex.

Not to admire Miss Fenton was impossible. To find one fault with her was equally impossible, and yet to love her was unlikely. But Mr. Sandford, Dorriforth's old tutor, and rigid monitor and friend, adored her, and often, with a shake of his head and a sigh, would he say to Miss Milner, "No, I am not so hard upon you as your guardian. I only desire you to love Miss Fenton; to resemble her, I believe, is above your ability."

As a Jesuit, he was a man of learning, and knew the hearts of women as well as those of men. He saw Miss Milner's heart at the first view of her person, and beholding in that little circumference a weight of folly that he wished to eradicate, he began to toil in the vineyard, eagerly courting her detestation of him in the hope of also making her abominate herself. In the mortification of slights he was an expert, and humbled her in her own opinion more than a thousand sermons would have done. She would have been cured of all her pride had she not possessed a degree of spirit beyond the generality of her sex!

II.--The Priest Marries His Ward

Finding Dorriforth frequently perplexed by his guardianship, Mr. Sandford advised that a suitable match should immediately be sought for her; but she refused so many offers that, believing her affections were set upon Lord Frederick, he insisted that she should be taken into the country at once. Her ready compliance delighted Dorriforth, and for six weeks all around was the picture of tranquillity. Then Lord Frederick suddenly appeared at the door as she alighted from her coach, and seizing her hand, entreated her "not to desert him in compliance with the injunctions of monkish hypocrisy."

Dorriforth heard this, standing silently by, with a manly scorn upon his countenance; but on Miss Milner's struggling to release her hand, which Lord Frederick was devouring with kisses, with an instantaneous impulse

he rushed forward and struck him a violent blow in the face. Then, leading her to her own chamber, covered with shame and confusion for what he had done, he fell on his knees before her, and earnestly "entreated her forgiveness for the indelicacy he had been guilty of in her presence."

To see her guardian at her feet struck her with a sense of impropriety as if she had seen a parent there. All agitation and emotion, she implored him to rise, and, with a thousand protestations, declared "that she thought the rashness of his action was the highest proof of his regard for her."

Finding that Lord Frederick had gone when he had resigned the care of his ward to Miss Woodley, Dorriforth returned to his own apartment with a bosom torn by excruciating sensations. He had departed from his sacred character, and the dignity of his profession and sentiments; he had treated with unpardonable insult a young nobleman whose only offence was love; he had offended and filled with horror a beautiful young woman whom it was his duty to protect from those brutal manners to which he himself had exposed her.

The outcome of this incident was a duel, to prevent which Miss Milner deceived him by confessing a passion for Lord Frederick, although to Miss Woodley she avowed the real truth, that it was Dorriforth she loved.

"Do you suppose I love Lord Frederick? Do you suppose I can love him? Oh, fly, and prevent my guardian from telling him this untruth! This duel is horrible even beyond anything else! Oh, Miss Woodley, pity the agonies of my heart, my heart by nature sincere, when such are the fatal propensities it cherishes that I must submit to the grossest falsehoods rather than reveal the truth! Are you so blind," she exclaimed, "as to believe I do not care for Mr. Dorriforth? Oh, Miss Woodley, I love him with all the passion of a woman, and with all the tenderness of a wife!"

"Silence!" cried Miss Woodley, struck with horror. Yet, amidst all her grief and abhorrence, pity was still predominant, and, seeing her friend's misery, she did all she could to comfort her. But she was resolved that she should leave home, and, on pain of revealing her secret to Mr. Dorriforth, induced her to pay a visit of indefinite length to her friends at Bath.

There, in the melancholy that possessed her, Miss Woodley's letters alone gave her consolation. In a short time her health became impaired; she was once in imminent danger, and during her delirium incessantly repeated her guardian's name. Miss Woodley journeyed to her at once, and so did Dorriforth, who, through the death of his cousin, Lord Elmwood, had acquired his title and estates. On this account he had received a dispensation from his vow of celibacy, and was enjoined to marry. His

ward felt a pleasure so exquisite on hearing this that the agitation of mind and person brought with it the sensation of exquisite pain; but, to her cruel grief, she found that he was, on the advice of his friends, already paying his addresses to Miss Fenton.

As if a poniard had thrust her to the heart, she writhed under this unexpected stroke; she felt, and she expressed anguish. Lord Elmwood was alarmed and shocked. But later, when, in his perplexity concerning his ward's marriage, he induced Miss Woodley to tell him on whom Miss Milner's choice was fixed, his vehemence filled her with alarm.

"For God's sake, take care what you are doing! You are destroying my prospects of futurity, you are making this world too dear to me! I am transported by the tidings you have revealed--and yet, perhaps, I had better not have heard them!" he exclaimed. And then, to prevent further question, he hastened out of the room.

Within a few days he was her professed lover--she, the happiest of human beings--Miss Woodley partaking in the joy. Mr. Sandford alone lamented with the deepest concern that Miss Fenton had been supplanted--and supplanted by Miss Milner.

Yet Miss Fenton was perhaps affected least of any by the change; she received everything with the same insipid smile of approbation, and the same cold indifference.

III.--A Fatal Experiment

Lost in the maze of happiness that surrounded her, Miss Milner oftentimes asked her heart, "Are not my charms even more invincible than I ever believed them to be? Dorriforth, the grave, the pious, the anchorite Dorriforth, by their force is animated to all the ardour of the most impassioned lover; while the proud priest, the austere guardian, is humbled, if I but frown, into the veriest slave of love." She then asked: "Why did I not keep him longer in suspense? He could not have loved me more, I believe, but my power over him might have been greater still. I am the happiest of women in the affection he has proved to me, but I wonder if it would exist under ill-treatment? If it would not, he still does not love me as I wish to be loved; if it would, my triumph, my felicity, would be enhanced."

Thus the dear-bought experiment of being loved in spite of her faults--a glory proud women ever aspire to--was, at present, the ambition of Miss Milner. She, who, as Dorriforth's ward had ever been gentle, and always obedient, became as a mistress, sometimes haughty, always insolent. He was surprised, but the novelty pleased him. Miss Milner, whom he tenderly loved, could put on no change that did not seem to become her.

But at last her attempt to rouse his jealousy by again encouraging Lord Frederick hurt him beyond measure. In a letter releasing her from her engagement to him, and announcing his immediate departure for a long Continental tour, he begged her for the short time they were to remain together not to insult him with an open preference for another. By complying with this request she would give him to believe that she thought he had, at least, faithfully discharged some part of his duty.

She was struck to despair. Pride alone kept her from revealing her anguish, though her death should be the immediate consequence! But Sandford, who had hitherto been most inimical to her, on the evening before Lord Elmwood's departure showed at last some kindness by entreating her to breakfast with them the following morning. There she sat silent, unable to eat, unable to speak, unable to move, until the moment for parting came. Then, unable to repress her tears as heretofore, as Elmwood took her hand in his, she suffered them to fall in torrents.

"What is all this?" cried Sandford, going up to them in anger.

They neither of them replied, or changed their situation.

"Separate this moment!" cried Sandford. "Or resolve to be separated only by--death! Lord Elmwood, do you love this woman?"

"More than my life!" he replied, with the most heartfelt accents.

He then turned to Miss Milner.

"Can you say the same by him?"

She spread her hands over her eyes, and exclaimed, "Oh, heavens!"

"I believe you can say so," returned Sandford. "And in the name of God, and your own happiness, since this is the state of you both, let me put it out of your power to part?"

On which he opened his book and--married them.

Nevertheless, on that joyful day which restored her lost lover to her hopes again, even on that very day after the ceremony was over, Miss Milner--with all the fears, the superstition of her sex--felt an excruciating shock when, looking on the ring Lord Elmwood had put upon her finger in haste, she perceived it was a mourning-ring.

Alas! in seventeen years the beautiful, beloved Miss Milner was no longer beautiful, no longer beloved, no longer virtuous.

Dorriforth, the pious, the good, the tender Dorriforth, was become a hard-hearted tyrant.

Miss Woodley had grown old, but less with years than grief.

The boy Harry Rushbrook had become a man and the apparent heir of Lord Elmwood's fortune, while his own daughter, his only child by his once-adored Miss Milner, he refused ever to see again, in vengeance to her mother's crime.

Sandford alone remained much as heretofore.

Lady Elmwood was a loved and loving bride seventeen years ago; now she lay on her death-bed. At thirty-five "her course was run." After four years of perfect happiness, Lord Elmwood was obliged to leave his wife and child while he went to visit his large estates in the West Indies. His voyage was tedious, his return delayed by serious illness, which a too cautious fear of her uneasiness prompted him to conceal. He was away three years.

It was no other than Lord Frederick Lawnly to whom Lady Elmwood sacrificed her own and her husband's future peace; she did not, however, elope with her paramour, but escaped to shelter herself in the most dreary retreat, where she partook of no comfort but the still unremitting friendship of Miss Woodley. Even her child she left behind, that she might be under her father's protection. Conceive, then, how sharp her agony was on beholding the child sent after her as the perpetual outcast of its father. Lord Elmwood's love to his wife had been extravagant--the effect of his hate was the same. Once more he met Lord Frederick in a duel, the effect of which was to leave his adversary so defaced with scars as never again to endanger the honour of a husband. He was himself dangerously wounded, yet nothing but the assurance that his opponent was slain could tear him from the field.

Now, after ten years of exile, the once gay, volatile Miss Milner lay dying with but one request to make--that her daughter should not suffer for her sin. Sandford was with her; by all the influence he ever had over Lord Elmwood, by his prayers, by his tears, he promised to implore him to own his child. She could only smile her thanks, but she was sufficiently sensible of his words to make a sign as if she wished to embrace him; but, finding life leaving her fast, with a struggle she clung to her child, and died in her arms.

V.--His Daughter's Happiness

Yet all that her mother's last appeal could obtain for the hapless Matilda, not as her child, but as the granddaughter of Mr. Milner, was the shelter of her father's roof on condition that she avoided his sight. When by accident or design he ever saw or heard from her, that moment his compliance with her mother's request ceased, and he abandoned her once more. Still, the joy of being, even in so remote a way, under her father's care, was extreme for her, though it was tempered with jealousy of Rushbrook--a feeling which even her noble heart could not completely quell--jealousy which was shared on her account by both Miss Woodley and Mr. Sandford, and frequently made them unjust to Harry, whom they regarded as an interloper.

But his passionate gratitude to Lady Elmwood, by whose entreaties he had been restored to his uncle's favour, had made him adore her daughter with an equal passion. He gazed with wonder at his uncle's insensibility to his own happiness, and would gladly have led him to the jewel he cast away, though even his own expulsion should be the fatal consequence.

At last, by accident, Lord Elmwood returned unexpectedly home when Matilda was descending the staircase, and, in her affright, she fell motionless into her father's arms. He caught her, as by the same impulse he would have caught anyone falling for want of aid. Yet, when he found her in his arms, he still held her there--gazed on her attentively--and pressed her to his bosom.

At length, trying to escape the snare into which he had been led, he was going to leave her on the spot where she fell, when her eyes opened, and she uttered, "Save me!" Her voice unmanned him. His long-restraining tears now burst forth, and, seeing her relapsing into the swoon, he called out eagerly to recall her. Her name did not, however, come to his recollection--nor any name but this--"Miss Milner, dear Miss Milner."

The sound did not awaken her; and now again he wished to leave her in this senseless state, that not remembering what had passed, she might escape the punishment.

But at this instant his steward passed, and into his hands he delivered his apparently dead child, his face agitated with shame, with pity, with anger, with paternal tenderness. On her recovery she was sent to a neighbouring farm, not more than thirty miles away, her father having given orders that it should be so.

Then a libertine lover of Lady Matilda's, finding her no longer under her father's protection, resolved to abduct her, and by raising an alarm of fire, caused all the inhabitants of the farmhouse to open the doors, when two men rushed in, and, with the plea of saving her from the flames, carried her away. News of this being taken to her father, he at once set out in pursuit, and reached her in her last agony of despair,

folding her in his arms with the unrestrained fondness of a parent.

It was now the middle of November; and yet, as Matilda passed along, never to her did the sun shine so bright as upon this morning; never did her imagination comprehend that the human heart could feel happiness true and genuine as hers!

Rushbrook had been detained at Elmwood during all this time, more from the persuasions, nay, prayers, of Sandford than the commands of Lord Elmwood. His uncle's summons for him to join them in town was, therefore, received with delight. Yet his joy was tempered by finding that it was to propose a matrimonial alliance that his uncle had sent for him; after a thousand fears, much confusion, and embarrassment, he at length frankly confessed his "heart was engaged, and had been so, long before his uncle offered to direct his choice."

On hearing on whom he had set his affections, Lord Elmwood immediately left the room for the apartment where Sandford, Miss Woodley, and Matilda were sitting, and cried with an angry voice, and with his countenance disordered, "Rushbrook has offended me beyond pardon. Go, Sandford, and tell him this instant to quit my house, and never dare to return."

But Matilda impeded him, and throwing her arms about his neck, cried, "Dear Mr. Sandford, do not!"

"How?" exclaimed her father.

She saw the impending frown, and knelt at his feet.

"Do you know what he has asked of me?" he asked.

"No," she replied, with the utmost innocence, "but whatever it is, my lord, though you do not grant it, yet pardon him for asking."

"Perhaps you would grant him what he has requested?" said her father.

"Most willingly, were it in my gift."

"It is," replied he. "Go to him in the library, and hear what he has to say; for on your will his fate shall depend."

Like lightning she flew out of the room; while even the grave Sandford smiled at the idea of their meeting. And whether the heart of Matilda could sentence Rushbrook to misery the reader is left to surmise; and if he supposes that it could not he has every reason to suppose that their wedded life was--a life of happiness.

JEN HSIU.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio Vol. I (of 2)*, by Songling Pu

Jen Chien-chih was a native of Yü-t'ai, and a dealer in rugs and furs. One day he set off for Shensi, taking with him every penny he could scrape together; and on the road he met a man who told him that his name was Shên Chu-t'ing, and his native place Su-ch'ien. These two soon became firm friends, and entered into a masonic bond[170] with each other, journeying on together by the same stages until they reached their destination. By-and-by Mr. Jen fell sick, and his companion had to nurse him, which he did with the utmost attention, but for ten days he gradually got worse and worse, and at length said to Shên, "My family is very poor. Eight mouths depend upon my exertions for food; and now, alas! I am about to die, far from my own home. You and I are brothers. At this distance there is no one else to whom I can look. Now in my purse you will find two hundred ounces of silver. Take half, and when you have defrayed my funeral expenses, use the balance for your return journey; and give the other half to my family, that they may be able to send for my coffin.[171] If, however, you will take my mortal remains with you home to my native place, these expenses need not be incurred." He then, with the aid of a pillow, wrote a letter, which he handed to Shên, and that evening he died. Thereupon Shên purchased a cheap coffin[172] for some five or six ounces of silver; and, as the landlord kept urging him to take away the body, he said he would go out and seek for a temple where it might be temporarily deposited. But he ran away and never went back to the inn; and it was more than a year before Jen's family knew what had taken place. His son was just about seventeen years of age, and had recently been reading with a tutor; but now his books were laid aside, and he proposed to go in search of his father's body. His mother said he was too young; and it was only when he declared he would rather not live than stay at home, that with the aid of the pawn-shop[173] enough money was raised to start him on his way. An old servant accompanied him, and it was six months before they returned and performed the last ceremonies over Jen's remains. The family was thus reduced to absolute destitution; but happily young Hsiu was a clever fellow, and when the days of mourning[174] were over, took his bachelor's degree. On the other hand, he was somewhat wild and very fond of gambling; and although his mother strictly prohibited such diversions, all her prohibitions were in vain. By-and-by the Grand Examiner arrived, and Hsiu came out in the fourth class. His mother was extremely angry, and refused to take food, which brought young Hsiu to his senses, and he promised her faithfully he would never gamble again. From that day he shut himself up, and the following year took a first class degree, coming out among the "senior" graduates.[175] His mother now advised him to take pupils, but his reputation as a disorderly fellow stuck to him, and no one would

entrust their sons to his care.

Just then an uncle of his, named Chang, was about to start with merchandise for the capital, and recommended that Hsiu should go along with him, promising himself to pay all expenses, an offer which Hsiu was only too pleased to accept. When they reached Lin-ch'ing, they anchored outside the Custom House, where they found a great number of salt-junks, in fact a perfect forest of masts; and what with the noise of the water and the people it was quite impossible to sleep.

Besides, as the row was beginning to subside, the clear rattle of dice from a neighbouring boat fell upon Hsiu's ear, and before long he was itching to be back again at his old games. Listening to hear if all around him were sound asleep, he drew forth a string of cash that he had brought with him, and thought he would just go across and try his luck. So he got up quietly with his money, and was on the point of going, when he suddenly recollected his mother's injunctions, and at once tying his purse-strings laid himself down to sleep. He was far too excited, however, to close his eyes; and after a while got up again and re-opened his purse. This he did three times, until at last it was too much for him, and off he went with his money. Crossing over into the boat whence the sounds proceeded, he beheld two persons engaged in gambling for high stakes; so throwing his money on the table, he begged to be allowed to join. The others readily consented, and they began to play, Hsiu winning so rapidly that soon one of the strangers had no money left, and was obliged to get the proprietor of the boat to change a large piece of silver for him, proceeding to lay down as much as several ounces of silver for a single stake.

As the play was in full swing another man walked in, who after watching for some time at length got the proprietor to change another lump of silver for him of one hundred ounces in weight, and also asked to be allowed to join. Now Hsiu's uncle, waking up in the middle of the night, and finding his nephew gone, and hearing the sound of dice-throwing hard by, knew at once where he was, and immediately followed him to the boat with a view of bringing him back. Finding, however, that Hsiu was a heavy winner, he said nothing to him, only carrying off a portion of his winnings to their own boat and making the others of his party get up and help him to fetch the rest, even then leaving behind a large sum for Hsiu to go on with. By-and-by the three strangers had lost all their ready money, and there wasn't a farthing left in the boat: upon which one of them proposed to play for lumps of silver, but Hsiu said he never went so high as that. This made them a little quarrelsome, Hsiu's uncle all the time trying to get him away; and the proprietor of the boat, who had only his own commission in view, managed to borrow some hundred strings of cash from another boat, and started them all again. Hsiu soon took this out of them; and, as day was beginning to dawn and the Custom House was about to open, he went off with his winnings back to his own boat.

The proprietor of the gambling-boat now found that the lumps of silver which he had changed for his customers were nothing more than so much tinsel, and rushing off in a great state of alarm to Hsiu's boat, told him what had happened and asked him to make it good; but when he discovered he was speaking to the son of his former travelling companion, Jen Chien-chih, he hung his head and slunk away covered with shame. For the proprietor of that boat was no other than Shên Chu-t'ing, of whom Hsiu had heard when he was in Shensi; now, however, that with supernatural aid[176] the wrongs of his father had been avenged, he determined to pursue the man no further. So going into partnership with his uncle, they proceeded north together; and by the end of the year their capital had increased five-fold. Hsiu then purchased the status of _chien-shêng_,[177] and by further careful investment of his money ultimately became the richest man in that part of the country.

FOOTNOTES:

[170] Besides the numerous secret societies so much dreaded by the Government, membership of which is punishable by death, very intimate friends are in the habit of adopting each other as sworn brothers, bound to stand by one another in cases of danger and difficulty, to the last drop of blood. The bond is cemented by an oath, accompanied by such ceremonies as fancy may at the moment dictate. The most curious of all, however, are the so-called "Golden Orchid" societies, the members of which are young girls, who have sworn never to enter into the matrimonial state. To such an extent have these sisterhoods spread in the Kuang-tung Province, that the authorities have been compelled to prohibit them under severe penalties.

[171] A Chinaman loves to be buried alongside of his ancestors, and poor families are often put to great straits to pay this last tribute of respect and affection to the deceased. At all large cities are to be found temporary burial grounds, where the bodies of strangers are deposited until their relatives can come to carry them away. Large freights of dead bodies are annually brought back to China from California, Queensland, and other parts to which the Chinese are in the habit of emigrating, to the great profit of the steamer-companies concerned. Coffins are also used as a means of smuggling, respect for the dead being so great that they are only opened under the very strongest suspicion.

[172] See No. XIV., note 104. The price of an elaborate Chinese coffin goes as high as £100 or £150.

[173] The never-failing resource of an impecunious Chinaman who has any property whatever bearing an exchange value. The pawn-shop proper is a licensed institution, where three per cent. _per month_ is

charged on all loans, all pledges being redeemable within sixteen months. It is generally a very high brick structure, towering far above the surrounding houses, with the deposits neatly packed up in paper and arranged on the shelves of a huge wooden skeleton-like frame, that completely fills the interior of the building, on the top of which are ranged buckets of water in case of fire, and a quantity of huge stones to throw down on any thieves who may be daring enough to attempt to scale the wall. [In Peking, houses are not allowed to be built above a certain height, as during the long summer months ladies are in the habit of sitting to spin or sew in their courtyards, very lightly clad.] Pawning goods in China is not held to be so disgraceful as with us; in fact, most people, at the beginning of the hot weather, pawn their furs and winter clothes, these being so much more carefully looked after there than they might be at home.

[174] Nominally of three years'--really of twenty-eight months'--duration.

[175] These are entitled to receive from Government a small allowance of rice, besides being permitted to exercise certain petty functions, for which a certain charge is authorized. See _Appendix_ A.

[176] One of the strangers was the disembodied spirit of Hsiu's father, helping his son to take vengeance on the wicked Shên.

[177] An intermediate step between the first and second degrees, to which certain privileges are attached.

TOMMY AND THOMAS

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IT was while Harry Lossing was at the High School that Mrs. Carriswood first saw Tommy Fitzmaurice. He was not much to see, a long lad of sixteen who had outgrown his jackets and was not yet grown to his ears.

At this period Mrs. Fitzmaurice was his barber, and she, having been too rash with the shears in one place, had snipped off the rest of his curly black locks "to match;" until he showed a perfect convict's poll, giving his ears all the better chance, and bringing out the rather square contour of his jaws to advantage. He had the true Irish-Norman face; a skin of fine texture, fair and freckled, high cheekbones, straight nose, and wide blue eyes that looked to be drawn with ink, because of their sharply pencilled brows and long, thick, black lashes. But the feature that Mrs. Carriswood noticed was Tommy's mouth, a flexible and delicately cut mouth, of which the lips moved lightly in speaking and seldom were quite in repose.

“The genuine Irish orator's mouth,” thought Mrs. Carriswood.

Tommy, however, was not a finished orator, and Mrs. Carriswood herself deigned to help him with his graduating oration; Tommy delivering the aforesaid oration from memory, on the stage of the Grand Opera House, to a warm-hearted and perspiring audience of his towns-people, amid tremendous applause and not the slightest prod-dings of conscience.

Really the speech deserved the applause; Mrs. Carriswood, who had heard half the eloquence of the world, spent three evenings on it; and she has a good memory.

Her part in the affair always amused her; though, in fact, it came to pass easily. She had the great fortune of the family. Being a widow with no children, and the time not being come when philanthropy beckons on the right hand and on the left to free-handed women, Mrs. Carriswood travelled. As she expressed it, she was searching the globe for a perfect climate. “Not that I in the least expect to find it,” said she, cheerfully, “but I like to vary my disappointments; when I get worn out being frozen, winters, I go somewhere to be soaked.” She was on her way to California this time, with her English maid, who gave the Lossing domestics many a jolly moment by her inextinguishable panic about red Indians. Mrs. Derry supposed these savages to be lurking on the prairie outside every Western town; and almost fainted when she did chance to turn the corner upon three Kickapoo Indians, splendid in paint and feathers, and peacefully vending the “Famous Kickapoo Sagwa.” She had others of the artless notions of the travelling English, and I fear that they were encouraged not only by the cook, the “second girl,” and the man-of-all-work, but by Harry and his chum, Tommy; I know she used to tell how she saw tame buffalo “roosting” on the streets, “w'ich they do look that like common cows a body couldn't tell 'em hapart!”

She had a great opinion of Tommy, a mystery to her mistress for a long time, until one day it leaked out that Tommy “and Master Harry, too,” had told her that Tommy's great-grandfather was a lord in the old country.

“The family seem to have sunk in the world since, Derry,” was Mrs. Carriswood's single remark, as she smiled to herself. After Derry was dismissed she picked up a letter, written that day to a friend of hers, and read some passages about Harry and Tommy, smiling again.

“Harry”--one may look over her pretty shoulder without impertinence, in a story--“Harry,” she wrote, “is a boy that I long to steal. Just the kind of boy we have both wanted, Sarah--frank, happy, affectionate. I must tell you something about him. It came out by accident. He has the Western business instincts, and what do you suppose he did? He actually started a wee shop of his own in the corner of the yard (really it is

a surprisingly pretty place, and they are quite civilized in the house, gas, hot water, steam heat, all most comfortable), and sold 'pop' and candy and cakes to the boys. He made so much money that he proposed a partnership to the cook and the setting up a little booth in the 'county fair,' which is like our rural cattle shows, you know. The cook (a superior person who borrows books from Mrs. Lossing, but seems very decent and respectful notwithstanding, and broils game to perfection. And SUCH game as we have here, Sarah!)--well, the cook made him cream-cakes, sandwiches, tarts, and candy, and Harry honorably bought all the provisions with his profits from the first venture. You will open your eyes at his father permitting such a thing, but Henry Lossing is a thorough Westerner in some ways, and he looks on it all as a joke. 'Might show the boy how to do business,' he says.

"Well, they had a ravishing display, so Alma, the cook, and William, the man, assured me--per Derry. All the sadder its fate; for alas! a gang of rowdy boys fell upon Harry, and while he was busy fighting half of them--he is as plucky as his uncle, the general--the other half looted the beautiful stock in trade! They would have despoiled our poor little merchant entirely but for the opportune arrival of a schoolmate who is mightily respected by the rowdies. He knocked one of them down and shouted after the others that he would give every one of them a good thrashing if they did not bring the plunder back; and as he is known to be a lad of his word for good or evil, actually the scamps did return most of the booty, which the two boys brushed off and sold, as far as it went (!) The consequence of the fray has been that Harry is unboundedly grateful to this Tommy Fitzmaurice, and is at present coaching him on his graduating oration. Fitzmaurice has studied hard and won honors, and wants to make a show with his oration, to please his father. 'You see,' says Harry, 'Tommy's father has saved money and is spending it all on Tommy, so's he can be educated. He needs Tommy in the business real bad, but he won't let him come in; he keeps him at school, and he thinks everything of his getting the valedictory, and Tommy, he worked nights studying to get it.' When I asked what was the father's business, Harry grew a bit confused. 'Well, he kept a saloon; but'--Harry hastened to explain--'it was a very nice saloon, never any trouble with the police there; why, Tommy knew every man on the force. And they keep good liquors, too,' said Harry, earnestly; 'throw away all the beer left in the glasses.' 'What else would they do with it?' asked innocent I. 'Why, keep it in a bucket,' said Harry, solemnly, 'and then slip the glass under the counter and half fill out of the bucket, then hold it under the keg LOW, so's the foam will come; that's a trick of the trade, you know. Tommy says his father would SCORN that!' There is a vista opened, isn't there? I was rather shocked at such associates for Harry, and told his mother. Did she think it a good idea to have such a boy coming to the house? a saloon-keeper's son? She did not laugh, as I half expected, but answered quite seriously that she had been looking up Tommy, that he was very much attached to Harry, and that she did not think he would teach him anything bad. He has, I find myself, notions of honor, though

they are rather the code of the street. And he picks up things quickly. Once he came to tea. It was amusing to see how he glued his eyes on Harry and kept time with his motions. He used his fork quite properly, only as Harry is a left-handed little fellow, the right-handed Thomas had the more difficulty.

“He is taking such vast pains with his 'oration' that I felt moved to help him. The subject is 'The Triumph of Democracy,' and Tommy civilly explained that 'democracy' did not mean the Democratic party, but 'just only a government where all the poor folks can get their rights and can vote.'

“The oration was the kind of spread-eagle thing you might expect; I can see that Tommy has formed himself on the orators of his father's respectable saloon. What he said in comment interested me more. 'Sure, I guess it is the best government, ma'am, though, of course, I got to make it out that way, anyhow. But we come from Ireland, and there they got the other kind, and me granny, she starved in the famine time, she did that--with the fever. Me father walked twenty mile to the Sackville's place, where they gave him some meal, though he wasn't one of their tenants; yes, and the lady told him how he would be cooking it. I never will forget that lady!'

“I saw a dramatic opportunity: would Tommy be willing to tell that story in his speech? He looked at me with an odd look--or so I imagined it! 'Why not?' says he; 'I'd as soon as not tell it to anyone of them, and why not to them all together?' Well, why not, when you come to think of it? So we have got it into the speech; and I, I myself, Sarah, am drilling young Demos-thenes, and he is so apt a scholar that I find myself rather pleasantly employed.” Having read her letter, Mrs. Carriswood hesitated a second and then added Derry's information at the bottom of the page. “I suppose the lordly ancestor was one of King James's creation--see Macaulay, somewhere in the second volume. I dare say there is a drop or two of good blood in the boy. He has the manners of a gentleman--but I don't know that I ever saw an Irishman, no matter how low in the social scale, who hadn't.”

Thus it happened that Tommy's valedictory scored a success that is a tradition of the High School, and came to be printed in both the city papers; copies of which journals Tommy's mother has preserved sacredly to this day; and I have no doubt, could one find them, they would be found wrapped around a yellow photograph of the “A Class” of 1870: eight pretty girls in white, smiling among five solemn boys in black, and Tommy himself, as the valedictorian, occupying the centre of the picture in his new suit of broadcloth, with a rose in his buttonhole and his hair cut by a professional barber for the occasion.

It was the story of the famine that really captured the audience; and Tommy told it well, with the true Irish fire, in a beautiful voice.

In the front seat of the parquette a little old man in a wrinkled black broadcloth, with a bald head and a fringe of whisker under his long chin, and a meek little woman, in a red Paisley shawl, wept and laughed by turns. They had taken the deepest interest in every essay and every speech. The old man clapped his large hands (which were encased in loose, black kid gloves) with unflagging vigor. He wore a pair of heavy boots, the soles of which made a noble thud on the floor.

“Ain't it wonderful the like of them young craters can talk like that!” he cried; “shure, Molly, that young lady who'd the essay--where is it?”--a huge black forefinger travelled down the page--“‘_ Music, The Turkish Patrol _,' No--though that's grand, that piece; I'll be spakin' wid Professor Von Keinnitz to bring it when we've the opening. Here 'tis, Molly: ' _ Tin, Essay. The Darkest Night Brings Out the Stars, Miss Mamie Odenheimer _.' Thru for you, mavourneen! And the sintiments, wasn't they illigant? and the lan-gwidge was as foine as Pat Ronan's speeches or Father--whist! will ye look at the flowers that shlip of a gyirl's gitting! Count 'em, will ye?”

“Fourteen bouquets and wan basket,” says the little woman, “and Mamie Odenheimer, she got seventeen bouquets and two baskets and a sign. Well,” she looked anxious, but smiled, “I know of siven bouquets Tommy will git for sure. And that's not countin' what Harry Lossing will do for him. Hiven bless the good heart of him!”

“Well, I kin count four for him on wan seat,” says the man, with a nod of his head toward the gay heap in the woman's lap, “barrin' I ain't on-vaygled into flinging some of thim to the young ladies!”

Harry Lossing, in the seat behind with his mother and Mrs. Carriswood, giggled at this and whispered in the latter lady's ear, “That's Tommy's father and mother. My, aren't they excited, though! And Tommy's white's a sheet--for fear he'll disappoint them, you know. He has said his piece over twice to me, to-day, he's so scared lest he'll forget. I've got it in my pocket, and I'm going behind when it's his turn, to prompt him. Did you see me winking at him? it sort of cheers him up.”

He was almost as keen over the floral procession as the Fitzmaurices themselves. The Lossing garden had been stripped to the last bud, and levies made on the asparagus-bed, into the bargain, and Mrs. Lossing and Alma and Mrs. Carriswood and Derry and Susy Lossing had made bouquets and baskets and wreaths, and Harry had distributed them among friends in different parts of the house. I say Harry, but, complimented by Mrs. Carriswood, he admitted ingenuously that it was Tommy's idea.

“Tommy thought they would make more show that way,” says Harry, “and they are all on the middle aisle, so his father and mother can see them; Tim O'Halloran has got one for him, too, and Mrs. Macillarney, and she's

got some splendid pinies. Picked every last one. They'll make a show!"

But Harry knew nothing of the most magnificent of his friend's trophies until it undulated gloriously down the aisle, above the heads of two men, white satin ribbons flying, tinfoil shining--an enormous horseshoe of roses and mignonette!

The parents were both on their feet to crane their necks after it, as it passed them amid the plaudits.

"Oh, it was YOU, Cousin Margaret; I know it was you," cried Harry.

He took the ladies over to the Fitzmaurices the minute that the diplomas were given; and, directly, Tommy joined them, attended by two admiring followers laden with the trophies. Mrs. O'Halloran and Mrs. Macillarney and divers of the friends, both male and female, joined the circle. Tommy held quite a little court. He shook hands with all the ladies, beginning with Mrs. Carriswood (who certainly never had found herself before in such a company, jammed between Alderman McGinnis's resplendent new tweeds and Mrs. Macillarney's calico); he affectionately embraced his mother, and he allowed himself to be embraced by Mrs. Macillarney and Mrs. O'Halloran, while Patrick Fitzmaurice shook hands with the alderman.

"Here's the lady that helped me on me piece, father; she's the lady that sent me the horseshoe, mother. Like to make you acquainted with me father and me mother. Mr. and Mrs. Fitzmaurice, Mrs. Carriswood."

In these words, Tommy, blushing and happy, presented his happy parents.

"Sure, I'm proud to meet you, ma'am," said Fitzmaurice, bowing, while his wife courtesied and wiped her eyes.

They were very grateful, but they were more grateful for the flowers than for the oratorical drilling. No doubt they thought that their Tommy could have done as well in any case; but the splendid horseshoe was another matter!

Ten years passed before Mrs. Carriswood saw her pupil again. During those years the town had increased and prospered; so had the Lossing Art Furniture Works. It was after Harry Lossing had disappointed his father. This is not saying that he had done anything out of the way; he had simply declined to be the fourth Harry Lossing on the rolls of Harvard College. Instead, he proposed to enter the business and to begin by learning his own trade. He was so industrious, he kept at it with such energy that his first convert was his father--no, I am wrong, Mrs. Carriswood was the first; Mrs. Lossing was not a convert, SHE had believed in Harry from the beginning. But all this was years before Mrs. Carriswood's visit.

Another of Master Harry's notions was his belief in the necessity of his "meddling"--so his father put it--in the affairs of the town, the state, and the nation, as well as those of the Lossing furniture company. But, though he was pleased to make rather cynical fun of his son's political enthusiasm, esteeming it in a sense a diverting and therefore reprehensible pursuit for a business man, the elder Lossing had a sneaking pride in it, all the same. He liked to bring out Harry's political shrewdness.

"Fancy, Margaret," says he, "whom do you think Harry has brought over to our side now? The shrewdest ward politician in the town--why, you saw him when he was a boy--Tommy Fitzmaurice."

Then Mrs. Carriswood remembered; she asked, amused, how was Tommy and where was he?

"Tommy? Oh, he went to the State university; the old man was bound to send him, and he was more dutiful than some sons. He was graduated with honors, and came back to a large, ready-made justice court's practice. Of course he drifted into criminal practice; but he has made a fine income out of that, and is the shrewdest, some folks say the least scrupulous, political manager in the county. And so, Harry, you have persuaded him to cast in his lot with the party of principle, have you? and he is packing the primaries?"

"I see nothing dishonest in our trying to get our friends out to vote at the primaries, sir."

"Of course not, but he may not stop there. However, I want Bailey elected, and I am glad he will work for us; what's his price?"

Harry blushed a little. "I believe he would like to be city attorney, sir," said he; and Mr. Lossing laughed.

"Would he make a bad one?" asked Mrs. Carriswood.

"He would make the best kind of a one," replied Harry, with youthful fervor; "he's a ward politician and all that, I know; but he has it in him to be an uncommon deal more! And I say, sir, do you know that he and the old man will take twenty-five thousand of the stock at par if we turn ourselves into a corporation?"

"How about this new license measure? won't that bear a little bit hard on the old man?" This from Mr. Lossing, who was biting his cigar in deep thought.

"That will not prevent his doing his duty; why, the old man for very pride will be the first to obey the law. You'll SEE!"

Six months later they did see, since it was mostly due to Fitzmaurice's efforts that the reform candidate was elected; as a consequence, Tommy became prosecuting attorney; and, to the amazement of the critics, made the best prosecuting attorney that the city had ever known.

It was during the campaign that Mrs. Carriswood met him. Her goddaughter, daughter of the friend to whom years ago she described Tommy, was with her. This time Mrs. Carriswood had recently added Florida to her disappointments in climates, and was back, as she told Mrs. Lossing, "with a real sense of relief in a climate that was too bad to make any pretensions."

She had brought Miss Van Harlem to see the shops. It may be that she would not have been averse to Harry Lossing's growing interested in young Margaret. She had seen a great deal of Harry while he was East at school, and he remained her first favorite, while Margaret was as good as she was pretty, and had half a million of dollars in her own right. They had seen Harry, and he was showing them through the different buildings or "shops," when a man entered who greeted him cordially, and whom he presented to Mrs. Carriswood. It was Tommy Fitzmaurice, grown into a handsome young man. He brought his heels together and made the ladies a solemn bow. "Pleased to meet you, ladies; how do you like the West?" said Tommy.

His black locks curled about his ears, which seemed rather small now; he had a good nose and a mobile, clean-shaven face. His hands were very white and soft, and the rim of linen above them was dazzling. His black frock-coat was buttoned snugly about his slim waist. He brushed his face with a fine silk handkerchief, and thereby diffused the fragrance of the best imported cologne among the odors of wood and turpentine. A diamond pin sparkled from his neckscarf. The truth is, he knew that the visitors were coming and had made a state toilet. "He looks half like an actor and half like a clergyman, and he IS all a politician," thought Mrs. Carriswood; "I don't think I shall like him any more." While she thought, she was inclining her slender neck toward him, and the gentlest interest and pleasure beamed out of her beautiful, dark eyes.

"We like the West, but I have liked it for ten years; this is not my first visit," said Mrs. Carriswood.

"I have reason to be glad for that, madam. I never made another speech so good."

He had remembered her; she laughed. "I had thought that you would forget."

"How could I, when you have not changed at all?"

“But you have,” says Mrs. Carriswood, hardly knowing whether to show the young man his place or not.

“Yes, ma'am, naturally. But I have not learned how to make a speech yet.”

“Ah, but you make very good ones, Harry tells me.”

“Much obliged, Harry. No, ma'am, Harry is a nice boy; but he doesn't know. I know there is a lot to learn, and I guess a lot to unlearn; and I feel all outside; I don't even know how to get at it. I have wished a thousand times that I could talk with the lady who taught me to speak in the first place.” He walked on by her side, talking eagerly. “You don't know how many times I have felt I would give most anything for the opportunity of just seeing you and talking with you; those things you said to me I always remembered.” He had a hundred questions evidently stinging his tongue. And some of them seemed to Mrs. Carriswood very apposite.

“I'm on the outside of such a lot of things,” says he. “When I first began to suspect that I was on the outside was when I went to the High School, and sometimes I was invited to Harry's; that was my first acquaintance with cultivated society. You can't learn manners from books, ma'am. I learned them at Harry's. That is,”--he colored and laughed,--“I learned SOME. There's plenty left, I know. Then, I went to the University. Some of the boys came from homes like Harry's, and some of the professors there used to ask us to their houses; and I saw engravings and oil paintings, and heard the conversation of persons of culture. All this only makes me know enough to KNOW I am outside. I can see the same thing with the lawyers, too. There is a set of them that are after another kind of things; that think themselves above me and my sort of fellows. You know all the talk about this being a free and equal country. That's the tallest kind of humbug, madam! It is that. There are sets, one above another, everywhere; big bugs and little bugs, if you will excuse the expression. And you can't influence the big ones without knowing how they feel. A fellow can't be poking in the dark in a speech or anywhere else. Now, these fellows here, they go into politics, sometimes; and there, I tell you, we come the nearest to a fair field and no favor! It is the best fellow gets the prize there--the sharpest-witted, the nerviest, and stanchest. Oh, talk of machine politics! all the soft chaps who ain't willing to get up early in the morning, or to go out in the wet, THEY howl about the primaries and corruption; let them get up and clean the primaries instead of holding their noses! Those fellows, I'm not nice enough for them, but I can beat them every time. They make a monstrous racket in the newspapers, but when election comes on they can't touch side, edge, or bottom!”

Discoursing in this fashion, with digressions to Harry in regard to the machines, the furniture, and the sales, that showed Mrs. Carriswood that

he meant to keep an eye on his twenty odd thousand dollars, he strolled at her side. To Miss Van Harlem he scarcely said three words. In fact, he said exactly three words, uttered as Miss Margaret's silken skirts swung too near a pot of varnish. They were "Look out, miss!" and at the same second, Tommy (who was in advance, with really no call to know of the danger), turned on his heel and whisked the skirts away, turning back to pick up the sentence he had dropped.

Tommy told Harry that Miss Van Harlem was a very handsome lady, but haughty-looking. Then he talked for half an hour about the cleverness of Mrs. Carriswood.

"I am inclined to think Tommy will rise." (Mrs. Carriswood was describing the interview to her cousin, the next day.) "What do you think he said to me last of all? 'How,' said he, 'does a man, a gentleman'--it had a touch of the pathetic, don't you know, the little hesitation he made on the word--'how does he show his gratitude to a lady who has done him a great service?' 'Young or old?' I said. 'Oh, a married lady,' he said, 'very much admired, who has been everywhere.' Wasn't that clever of him? I told him that a man usually sent a few flowers. You saw the basket to-day--evidently regardless of expense. And fancy, there was a card, a card with a gilt edge and his name written on it."

"The card was his mother's. She has visiting cards, now, and pays visits once a year in a livery carriage. Poor Mrs. Fitzmaurice, she is always so scared; and she is such a good soul! Tommy is very good to her."

"How about the father? Does he still keep that 'nice' saloon?"

"Yes; but he talks of retiring. They are not poor at all, and Tommy is their only child; the others died. It is hard on the old man to retire, for he isn't so very old in fact, but if he once is convinced that his calling stands in the way of Tommy's career, he won't hesitate a second."

"Poor people," said Mrs. Carriswood; "do you know, Grace, I can see Tommy's future; he will grow to be a boss, a political boss. He will become rich by keeping your streets always being cleaned--which means never clean--and giving you the worst fire department and police to be obtained for money; and, by and by, a grateful machine will make him mayor, or send him to the Legislature, very likely to Congress, where he will misrepresent the honest State of Iowa. Then he will bloom out in a social way, and marry a gentlewoman, and they will snub the old people who are so proud of him."

"Well, we shall see," said Mrs. Lossing; "I think better things of Tommy. So does Harry."

Part of the prophecy was to be speedily fulfilled. Two years later, the Honorable Thomas Fitzmaurice was elected mayor of his city, elected by the reform party, on account of his eminent services--and because he was the only man in sight who had the ghost of a chance of winning. Harry's version was: "Tommy jests at his new principles, but that is simply because he doesn't comprehend what they are. He laughs at reform in the abstract; but every concrete, practical reform he is as anxious as I or anybody to bring about. And he will get them here, too."

He was as good as his word; he gave the city an admirable administration, with neither fear nor favor. Some of the "boys" still clung to him; these, according to Harry, were the better "boys," who had the seeds of good in them and only needed opportunity and a leader. Tommy did not flag in zeal; rather, as the time went on and he soared out of the criminal courts into big civil cases involving property, he grew up to the level of his admirers' praises. "Tommy," wrote Mr. Lossing, presently, "is beginning to take himself seriously. He has been told so often that he is a young lion of reform, that he begins to study the role in dead earnest. I don't talk this way to Harry, who believes in him and is training him for the representative for our district. What harm? Verily, his is the faith that will move mountains. Besides, Tommy is now rich; he must be worth a hundred thousand dollars, which makes a man of wealth in these parts. It is time for him to be respectable."

Notwithstanding this preparation, Mrs. Carriswood (then giving Washington the benefit of her doubts of climate) was surprised one day to receive a perfectly correct visiting card whereon was engraved, "Mr. Thomas Sackville Fitzmaurice, M.C."

The young lady who was with her lifted her brilliant hazel eyes and half smiled. "Is it the droll young man we met once at Mrs. Lossing's? Pray see him, Aunt Margaret," said Miss Van Harlem.

Mrs. Carriswood shrugged her shoulders and ordered the man to show him up.

There entered, in the wake of the butler, a distinguished-looking personage who held out his hand with a perfect copy of the bow that she saw forty times a day. "He is taking himself very seriously," she sighed; "he is precisely like anybody else!" And she felt her interest snuffed out by Tommy's correctness. But, directly, she changed her mind; the unfailing charm of his race asserted itself in Tommy; she decided that he was a delightful, original young man, and in ten minutes they were talking in the same odd confidence that had always marked their relation.

"How perfectly you are gotten up! Are you INSIDE, now?"

"Ah, do you remember that?" said he; "that's awfully good of you. Which

is so fortunate as to please you, my clothes or my deportment?"

"Both. They are very good. Where did you get them, Tommy? I shall take the privilege of my age and call you Tommy."

"Thank you. The clothes? Oh, I asked Harry for the proper thing, and he recommended a tailor. I think Harry gave me the manners, too."

"And your new principles?" She could not resist this little fling.

"I owe a great deal in that way to Harry, also," answered he, with gravity.

Gone were the days of sarcastic ridicule, of visionary politics. Tommy talked of the civil service in the tone of Harry himself. He was actually eloquent.

"Why, Aunt Margaret, he is a remarkable young man," exclaimed Miss Van Harlem; "his honesty and enthusiasm are refreshing in this pessimist place. I hope he will come again. Did you notice what lovely eyes he has?"

Before long it was not pure good-nature that caused Mrs. Carriswood to ask Fitzmaurice to her house. He was known as a rising young man, One met him at the best houses; yet he was a prodigious worker, and had made his mark in committees, before the celebrated speech that sent him into all the newspaper columns, or that stubborn and infinitely versatile fight against odds which inspired the artist of PUCK.

Tommy bore the cartoon to Mrs. Carriswood, beaming. She had not seen that light in his face since the memorable June afternoon in the Opera-house. He sent the paper to his mother, who vowed the picture "did not favor Tommy at all, at all. Sure Tommy never had such a red nose!"

The old man, however, went to his ex-saloon, and sat in state all the morning, showing Tommy's funny picture.

It was about this time that Mrs. Carriswood observed something that took her breath away: Tommy Fitzmaurice had the presumption to be attentive to my lady's goddaughter, Miss Van Harlem. Nor was this the worst; there were indications that Miss Van Harlem, who had refused the noble names and titles of two or three continental nobles, and the noble name unaccompanied by a title of the younger son of an English earl, without mentioning the half-dozen "nice" American claimants--Miss Van Harlem was not angry.

The day this staggering blow fell on her, Mrs. Carriswood was in her dressing-room, peacefully watching Derry unpack a box from Paris, in anticipation of a state dinner. And Miss Van Harlem, in a bewitching wrapper, sat on the lounge and admired. Upon this scene of feminine

peace and happiness enter the Destroyer, in the shape of a note from Tommy Fitzmaurice! Were they going on Beatoun's little excursion to Alexandria? If they were, he would move heaven and earth to put off a committee meeting, in order to join them. By the way, he was to get the floor for his speech that afternoon. Wouldn't Mrs. Carriswood come to inspire him? Perhaps Miss Van Harlem would not be bored by a little of it.

It was a well-worded note; as Mrs. Carriswood read it she realized for the first time how completely Tommy was acclimated in society. She remembered his plaint years ago, and his awe of "oil paintings" and "people of culture;" and she laughed half-sadly as she passed the note over to Miss Van Harlem.

"I presume it is the Alexandria excursion that the Beatouns were talking about yesterday," she said, languidly. "He wants to show that young Irishman that we have a mild flavor of antiquity, ourselves. We are to see Alexandria and have a real old Virginian dinner, including one of the famous Beatoun hams and some of the '69 Chateau Yquem and the sacred '47 port. I suppose he will have the four-in-hand buckboard. 'A small party '--that will mean the Honorable Basil Sackville, Mrs. Beatoun, Lilly Denning, probably one of the Cabinet girls, Colonel Turner, and that young Russian Beatoun is so fond of, Tommy Fitzmaurice-----"

"Why do you always call Mr. Fitzmaurice Tommy?"--this interruption comes with a slight rise of color from young Margaret.

"Everybody calls him Tommy in his own town; a politician as popular as he with the boys is naturally Tommy or Jerry or Billy. They slap him on the back or sit with an arm around his neck and concoct the ways to rule us."

"I don't think anyone slaps Mr. Fitzmaurice on the back and calls him Tommy, NOW," says Margaret, with a little access of dignity.

"I dare say his poor old father and mother don't venture on that liberty; I wish you had seen them----"

"He has told me about them," says Margaret.

And Mrs. Carriswood's dismay was such that for a second she simply gasped. Were things so far along that such confessions were made? Tommy must be very confident to venture; it was shrewd, very shrewd, to forestall Mrs. Carriswood's sure revelations--oh, Tommy was not a politician for nothing!

"Besides," Margaret went on, with the same note of repressed feeling in her voice, "his is a good family, if they have decayed; his ancestor was

Lord Fitzmaurice in King James's time.”

“She takes HIM seriously too!” thought Mrs. Carriswood, with inexpressible consternation; “what SHALL I say to her mother?”

Strange to say, perhaps, considering that she was so frankly a woman of the world, her stub-bornest objection to Tommy was not an objection of expediency. She had insensibly grown to take his success for granted, like the rest of the Washington world; he would be a governor, a senator, he might be--anything! And he was perfectly presentable, now; no, it would be on the whole an investment in the future that would pay well enough; his parents would be awkward, but they were old people, not likely to be too much _en evidence_.

Mrs. Carriswood, while not overjoyed, would not feel crushed by such a match, but she did view what she regarded as Tommy's moral instability, with a dubious and fearful eye. He was earnest enough for his new principles now; but what warrant was there of his sincerity? Margaret and her mother were high-minded women. It was the gallant knight of her party and her political faith that the girl admired, the valiant fight, not the triumph! No mere soldier of fortune, no matter how successful or how brilliant, could win her; if Tommy were the mercenary, not the knight, no worldly glory could compensate his wife.

Wherefore, after a bad quarter of an hour reflecting on these things, Mrs. Carriswood went to the Capitol, resolved to take her goddaughter away. She would not withdraw her acceptance of the Beatouns' invitation, no; let the Iowa congressman have every opportunity to display his social shortcomings in contrast with the accomplished Russian, and Jack Turner, the most elegant man in the army; the next day would be time enough for a telegram and a sudden flitting. Yet in the midst of her plans for Tommy's discomfiture she was assailed by a queer regret and reluctance. Tommy's fascination had affected even a professional critic of life; he had been so amusing, so willing, so trusting, so useful, that her chill interest had warmed into liking. She felt a moving of the heart as the handsome black head arose, and the first notes of that resonant, thrilling voice swelled above the din on the floor.

It was the day of his great speech, the speech that made him, it was said.

As Mrs. Carriswood sank back, turning a little in an instinctive effort to repulse her own sympathy, she was aware of the presence near her of an elderly man and woman. The old man wore a shining silk hat and shining new black clothes. His expansive shirt-bosom was very white, but not glossy, and rumpled in places; and his collar was of the spiked and antique pattern known as a “dickey.” His wrinkled, red face was edged by a white fringe of whisker. He wore large gold-bowed spectacles, and his jaws worked incessantly.

The woman was a little, mild, wrinkled creature, with an anxious blue eye and snowy hair, smoothed down over her ears, under her fine bonnet. She was richly dressed, but her silks and velvets ill suited the season. Had she seen them anywhere else, Mrs. Carriswood might not have recognized them; but there, with Tommy before them, both of them feverishly absorbed in Tommy, she recognized them at a glance. She had a twinge of pity, watching the old faces pale and kindle. With the first rustle of applause, she saw the old father slip his hand into the old mother's. They sat well behind a pillar; and however excited they became, they never so lost themselves as to lean in front of their shield. This, also, she noticed. The speech over, the woman wiped her eyes. The old man joined in the tumult of applause that swept over the galleries, but the old woman pulled his arm, evidently feeling that it was not decent for them to applaud. She sat rigid, with red cheeks and her eyes brimming; he was swaying and clapping and laughing in a roar of delight. But it was he that drew her away, finally, while she fain would have lingered to look at Tommy receiving congratulations below.

"Poor things," said Mrs. Carriswood, "I do believe they haven't let him know that they are here." And she remembered how she had pitied them for this very possibility of humiliation years before. But she did not pursue the adventure, and some obscure motive prevented her speaking of it to Miss Van Harlem.

Did Tommy's parents tell Tommy? If they did, Tommy made no sign. The morning found him with the others, in a beautiful white flannel suit, with a silk shirt and a red silk sash, looking handsomer than any man of the party. He took the congratulations of the company modestly. Either he was not much puffed up, or he had the art of concealment.

They saw Alexandria in a conscientious fashion, for the benefit of the guest of the day. He was a modest young fellow with a nose rather too large for his face, a long upper lip, and frank blue eyes. He made himself agreeable to one of the Cabinet girls, on the front seat, while Tommy, just behind him, had Miss Van Harlem and bliss for his portion.

The old streets, the toppling roofs, the musty warehouses, the uneven pavement, all pleased the young creatures out in the sunshine. They made merry over the ancient ball-room, where Washington had asked a far-away ancestress of Beatoun to dance; and they decorously walked through the old church.

IT happened in the church. Mrs. Carriswood was behind the others; so she saw them come in, the same little old couple of the Capitol.

In the chancel, Beatoun was explaining; beside Beatoun shone a curly black head that they knew.

Mrs. Carriswood sat in one of the high old pews. Through a crack she could look into the next pew; and there they stood. She heard the old man: "Whist, Molly, let's be getting out of this! HE is here with all his grand friends. Don't let us be interrupting him."

The old woman's voice was so like Tommy's that it made Mrs. Carriswood start. Very softly she spoke: "I only want to look at him a minute, Pat, jest a minute. I ain't seen him for so long."

"And is it any longer for you than for me?" retorted the husband. "Ye know what ye promised if I'd be taking you here, unbeknownst. Don't look his way! Look like ye was a stranger to him. Don't let us be mortifying him wid our country ways. Like as not 'tis the prisidint, himself, he is colloquein' wid, this blessed minute. Shtep back and be a stranger to him, woman!"

A stranger to him, his own mother! But she stepped back; she turned her patient face. Then--Tommy saw her.

A wave of red flushed all over his face. He took two steps down the aisle, and caught the little figure in his arms.

"Why, mother?" he cried, "why, mother, where did you drop from?"

And before Mrs. Carriswood could speak she saw him step back and push young Sackville forward, crying, "This is my father, this is the boy that knew your grandmother."

He did it so easily; he was so entirely unaffected, so perfectly unconscious, that there was nothing at all embarrassing for anyone. Even the Cabinet girl, with a grandmother in very humble life, who must be kept in the background, could not feel disconcerted.

For this happy result Mrs. Carriswood owns a share of the credit. She advanced on the first pause, and claimed acquaintanceship with the Fitzmaurices. The story of their last meeting and Tommy's first triumph in oratory came, of course; the famous horseshoe received due mention; and Tommy described with much humor his terror of the stage. From the speech to its most effective passage was a natural transition; equally natural the transition to Tommy's grandmother, the Irish famine, and the benevolence of Lady Sackville.

Everybody was interested, and it was Sackville himself, who brought the Fitzmaurices' noble ancestors, the apocryphal Viscounts Fitzmaurice of King James's creation, on to the carpet.

He was entirely serious. "My grandmother told me of your great-grandfather, Lord Fitzmaurice; she saw him ride to hounds once, when she was a little girl. They say he was the boldest rider in

Ireland, and a renowned duellist too. King James gave the title to his grandfather, didn't he? and the countryside kept it, if it was given rather too late in the day to be useful. I am glad you have restored the family fortunes, Mr. Fitzmaurice."

The Cabinet girl looked on Tommy with respect, and Miss Van Harlem blushed like an angel.

"All is lost," said Mrs. Carriswood to herself; yet she smiled. Going home, she found a word for Tommy's ear. The old Virginian dinner had been most successful. The Fitzmaurices (who had been almost forced into the banquet by Beatoun's imperious hospitality) were not a wet blanket in the least. Patrick Fitzmaurice, brogue and all, was an Irish gentleman without a flaw. He blossomed out into a modest wag; and told two or three comic stories as acceptably as he was used to tell them to a very different circle--only, carrying a fresher flavor of wit to this circle, perhaps, it enjoyed them more. Mrs. Fitzmaurice looked scared and ate almost nothing, with the greatest propriety, and her fork in her left hand. Yet even she thawed under Miss Van Harlem's attentions and gentle Mrs. Beatoun's tact, and the winning ways of the last Beatoun baby. She took this absent cherub to her heart with such undissembled warmth that its mother ever since has called her "a sweet, funny little old lady."

They were both (Patrick and his wife) quite unassuming and retiring, and no urging could dissuade them from parting with the company at the tavern door.

"My word, Tommy, your mother and I can git home by ourselves," whispered honest Patrick; "we've not exceeded--if the wines WERE good. I never exceeded in my life, God take the glory!"

But he embraced Tommy so affectionately in parting that I confess Mrs. Carriswood had suspicions. Yet, surely, it is more likely that his brain was--let us not say TURNED, but just a wee bit TILTED, by the joy and triumph of the occasion rather than by Beatoun's port or champagne.

But Mrs. Carriswood's word had nothing to do with Tommy's parents, ostensibly, though, in truth, it had everything to do. She said: "Will you dine with us to-morrow, quite _en famille_, Thomas?"

"I ought to tell you, I suppose, that I find your house a pretty dangerous paradise, Mrs. Carriswood," says Tommy.

"And I find you a most dangerous angel, Thomas; but--you see I ask you!"

"Thank you," answers Tommy, in a different tone; "you've always been an angel to me. What I owe to you and Harry Lossing--well, I can't talk about it. But see here, Mrs. Carriswood, you always have called me

Tommy; now you say Thomas; why this state?"

"I think you have won your brevet, Thomas."

He looked puzzled, and she liked him the better that he should not make enough of his conduct to understand her; but, though she has called him Tommy often since, he keeps the brevet in her thoughts. In fact, Mrs. Carriswood is beginning to take the Honorable Thomas Fitzmaurice and his place in the world seriously, herself.

AUNT ZEZE'S TEARS, By Carmen Dolores

(Emilia Moncorva Bandeira de Mello, 1852-1910)

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Brazilian Tales*, by Various, translated by Isaac Goldberg

Pale and thin, for eighteen years she had lived with her youngest sister, who had married very early and now possessed five children: two young ladies of marriageable age, a third still in short dresses, and two little boys.

Maria-José, whose nickname was Zézé, had never been beautiful or winning. Upon her father's death it was thought best that she should go to live with her sister Engracigna's family. Here she led a monotonous existence, helping to bring up her nephews and nieces, who were born in that young and happy household with a regularity that brooked small intervals between the births.

A long, pointed nose disfigured her face, and her lips, extremely thin, looked like a pale crack. Her thoughtful gaze alone possessed a certain melancholy attractiveness. But even here, her eyes, protruding too far for the harmony of the lines upon her face seemed always to be red, and her brows narrow and sparse.

Of late, an intricate network of wrinkles as fine as hairs, had formed at the corner of her eyes. From her nose, likewise, two furrows ran along the transparent delicacy of her skin and reached either side of her mouth. When she smiled, these wrinkles would cover her countenance with a mask of premature age, and threatened soon to disfigure her entirely. And yet, from habit, and through passive obedience to routine, Maria-José continued to dress like a young girl of eighteen, in brightly colored gowns, thin waists and white hats that ill became her frail and oldish face.

She would remain for a long time in painful indecision when it was a matter of picking out some piece of goods that was of too bright a red or blue,--as if instinctively she understood the disharmony of these hues with her age, whose rapid oncoming they moreover placed in all the

more noticeable contrast. And at such times Engracigna and her daughters would say to her with a vehemence whose effect they little guessed, "Why, Zézé! Buy something and be done with it!... How silly! Do you want to dress like a widow? What a notion!"

And at bottom they meant it.

None of them saw Maria-José as she really was. Living with her day by day had served to efface the actual appearance of the faded old maid. For, in the minds of the mother and her daughters, who were moreover of a frivolous and indifferent sort, Zézé had grown to be the type, very vague, to be sure, but the eternal type of young girl of marriagable years who always should be well dressed and smiling.

When she would be out walking with her nieces, of sixteen and seventeen years, who wore the same clothes as she herself did, but whose graceful and lively charm became their gay colors of youth so well, Zézé's intelligence saw only too plainly the contrast between her and them; she would hold aloof from the laughing set, morose, wounded, as if oppressed by an unspeakable shame.

Ah! Who can depict the secret chagrin of an old maid who sees pass by in useless monotony her dark, loveless, despairing days, without hope even of some event of personal interest, while about her moves the busy whirl of happier creatures whose life has but one goal, who feel emotions and tendernesses, and who look upon her simply as an obscure accessory in the household's affairs! They all loved her, of course, but not one of them suspected that she, too, could cherish those aspirations that are common to all human beings.

Her self-denial seemed to be a most natural thing; indeed, they hardly considered her in the light of a living person; she was no longer of any consequence.

This was an attitude that satisfied the general egotism of the family, and to which they all had grown accustomed, never suspecting the grievous aspect of her sacrifice which was hidden by a sentiment of proud dignity.

So, when they would go to the theatre, and the box held only five--Engracigna, her husband, Fabio, and the three young ladies,--Maria-José knew beforehand that her sister, snugly wrapped in her opera-cloak, would come to her and say gently, in that purring voice of hers: "You'll stay at home with the children tonight, won't you, Zézé? Little Paul isn't very well, and I wouldn't think of leaving him with anybody else...."

And she would remain behind, without betraying the revolt within her which, upon each occasion of these evidences of selfishness, would make

the anemic blood in her veins tremble with agitation.

Alone in the dining-room she would ply her needle mechanically, while her nephews would amuse themselves with the toys scattered upon the table,--colored pictures and lead soldiers. Every other moment they would call her.

"Aunt Zézé, look at George pinching me!"

"I am not! Paul hit me first!..."

And the good aunt would quiet them. Then, after both had been put to sleep in their little twin beds, she would rest her elbows upon the window-sill of her gloomy old-maid's room, and placing both hands beneath her sharp chin, her gaze directed towards heaven, she would lose herself in contemplation of the stars that shone in the limpid sky, less lonely, surely, than she upon earth. In vain did her eyes seek in the eyes of another that expression of sympathy and tenderness which alone would console her....

The truth is that Maria-José was suffering from the disappointment of unrequited passion. She had fallen in love with Monjardin, a poet and great friend of her brother-in-law, Fabio. Monjardin came to the house every Sunday.

Older than she, almost forty, but having preserved all the attractiveness of youth,--a black moustache, a vigorous, yet graceful figure, eyes still bright, charming and wide-awake,--Monjardin, without knowing it, had conquered Zézé.

This had come about in a rather curious manner. Finding the conversation of Fabio's wife and daughters too commonplace, Monjardin, when he would recite some of his poems or tell some story connected with his literary life, preferred to address Maria-José, whom he saw to be of a serious and impressive nature.

"Let's have another poem, please, Mr. Monjardin!" she would ask in supplicating tone. "For instance, that one you call 'Regrets.' You know?"

And then he would describe in his verse the grief of a heart, disillusioned and broken by the cruelties of fate, that evoked in vain the remembrance of yesterday's lost loves, vanished in the mists of eternal despair.

He recited these bitter griefs in a strong, healthy man's voice, erect in the center of the parlor, looking mechanically, distractedly at Maria-José with his dreamy eyes; the concentrated effort of his memory brought to his face an involuntary immobility which Maria-José, most

deliciously touched, drank in.

The poet had announced that he had written a poem which he would recite at Zézé's anniversary dinner. The date for this was but a few days distant, and ever since the poet's announcement the whole family had taken to teasing the old maid, christening her "the muse of inspiration," and asking her when the wedding would take place....

She smiled ingenuously; at such times her face would even take on an air of unusual happiness; her features grew animated, less wrinkled and more firm.

On the day of the celebration Maria-José came out of her room radiant with hope. At the belt of her white dress bloomed a rose; a little blood, set pulsing by her agitated heart, brought a feeble color to her marble cheeks, from which now protruded her long nose in a manner less displeasing than usual.

"See, mamma," remarked one of the nieces, "doesn't Zézé look like a young girl today?"

They dined amidst merry chatter. Seated directly across from Monjardin, Maria-José, hiding her glances behind the fruit-bowls that covered the table, looked at him furtively without surfeit. Her poor heart beat as if it would burst, waiting in agonized suspense for the poem in which the poet, without doubt, was to declare his intimate feelings for her. Monjardin had already pointed to his pocket as a token that he had the verses with him, and Zézé had trembled with gratification as she bashfully lowered her long face.

Champagne sparkled in the glasses and toasts were given. Several guests of distinction spoke first, then followed the hosts and their children,--frolicsome little things. Finally Monjardin arose and unfolded a manuscript, asking permission to declaim the verses which he had composed in honor of Maria-José, the central figure of the occasion. The guests greeted his remarks with noisy and enthusiastic approbation.

"Hear! Hear!"

Engracigna and her daughters leaned over and cast malicious glances in the direction of Maria-José, but she was paying no attention to them. Her ears were buzzing; it seemed that everything was turning round.

Monjardin, the center of all eyes, made pompous preparation; he pulled down his vest, arranged his sleeves and, in sonorous, cadenced voice began to recite his alexandrines, scanning the lines impeccably.

His poem opened with a eulogy of the ineffable virtue, compounded of

self-abnegation and chastity, that distinguished the angelic creature who, with her white tutelary wings, watched over the happiness of his dear friend's love nest. He then recalled that the date of this day commemorated the happy birth of a being of immaculate purity, Maria-José, a veritable saint who had renounced all her own aspirations so that she might consecrate herself entirely to the duties of her sister's family; gentle figure of the mother-guardian, who would soon be the beloved grandmother sharing with her sister the joys of younger households which would soon be formed, offsprings of that home which her devoted tenderness as aunt and sister at present cultivated. As he came to a close, the poet raised his cup of sparkling wine and, in exalted voice, drank to the health of Zézé amidst the loud huzzahs of all present.

"Long live Aunt Zézé! Hurrah for Aunt Zézé!" cried the children, glass in hand, while the nieces laughed loudly, blushing to the ears, for they had understood very well the poet's reference to future "younger households."

Fabio and his wife, their eyes somewhat brightened by the strong champagne, proposed in turn their toast to Zézé.

"Here's to Zézé and the eighteen happy years we've lived together!..."

Maria-José, as soon as she had seized the significance of Monjardin's verses, had grown deathly pale; stricken by sudden disillusionment, she felt a glacial chill overwhelm her body to the very marrow; she feared that she would faint straightway and provide a spectacle for the guests, who were all drinking her health, their eyes focussed upon her. A veil of tears spread before her sight.... In vain she tried to repress them, to force a smile of thanks upon her face. The smile wrinkled into a dolorous grimace; she succeeded only in convulsing her contracted visage with the sobs that she sought to restrain. Overcome at last, humiliated, powerless, she broke into tears, and this unforeseen denouement put an end at once to all the pleasure of the dinner.

"Zézé! Zézé! What ails you?..."

Engracigna had rushed to her side in alarm; everyone rose, seeking the reason for the outburst; they surrounded the poor creature, whose head had sunk upon the table, in the midst of the rose petals, the fruits and the glasses which were strewn in charming confusion.

"What is the trouble?..."

A nervous attack, perhaps?... Confusion produced in her by the touching poem?...

Finally they raised Maria-José's head and bathed it in cool water; whereupon the face of the poor old maid stood revealed in all the ugliness that her spasms of convulsive weeping cast over it, with her large aquiline nose, her protruding eyes and her livid lips ...

And now Monjardin drew near. Delicately raising the icy fingers of Maria-José he lifted them to the edge of his perfumed moustache and placed upon them a grateful kiss; then, turning to Engracigna's daughters he said, with a solemn, self-complacent tone, "Aunt Zézé's tears are the most beautiful homage that could be rendered to my poor verses."